

THE STRAITS TIMES

Home Singapore's new sub launched B1



Top of the News
Footballer misses NS deadline A17



Top of the News
CPF payout issue cleared up A17



Business Non-oil exports plunge 10.1% C1



\$6.1b Merdeka package unveiled

- \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus, includes GST vouchers, 50% income tax rebate up to \$200
 - \$4.6 billion over three years to help firms and workers build capabilities to stay relevant
- About 30% of total expenditure to support defence, security and diplomacy efforts
 - \$5.1 billion to fund measures such as ElderFund and CareShield Life subsidies
- Work permit, S Pass quotas for service sector will be tightened from next year
 - Travellers will get lower GST relief and less duty-free alcohol concession

Royston Sim
Deputy News Editor (Politics)

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday delivered a generous but targeted Budget aimed at helping Singaporeans with healthcare costs and other expenses, and giving businesses and workers support to thrive in a changing global environment.

He unveiled a \$6.1 billion fund that will subsidise healthcare for Singaporeans born in the 1950s, with extra subsidies for outpatient care and MediShield Life premiums, as well as Medisave top-ups for five years.

Called the Merdeka Generation Package, this will benefit nearly 500,000 Singaporeans in all, and is the second initiative of its kind after the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package announced in 2014.

With Singapore commemorating its bicentenary this year, Mr Heng announced two initiatives to mark what he called a key turning point in Singapore's development – a \$200 million community fund to match charity donations, and a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus.

This special bonus includes GST vouchers of up to \$300 in cash that will benefit 1.4 million Singaporeans, and a personal income tax rebate of 50 per cent, capped at \$200.

These measures are part of Singapore's efforts to forge a caring and inclusive society, said Mr Heng, who presented his first Budget since being named as the designated successor to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong late last year.

Noting that support for globalisation was on the wane worldwide, Mr Heng also flagged longer-term domestic challenges

We are investing to keep Singapore safe and secure. We are restructuring our economy to enable our businesses and workers to thrive. We are building a more caring and inclusive society, and we are building Singapore as a global city and a home for all.

FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWE KEAT, presenting the Budget for 2019.



PHOTO: GOV.SG

such as ageing, social mobility, economic transformation and climate change.

Singapore should build on its strengths, he said, pointing to the country's multicultural society and openness to diversity.

Mr Heng also devoted part of his two-hour speech to the importance of keeping Singapore safe and secure. "We cannot take our peace, prosperity and stability for granted," he said.

That is why the Government will continue to invest a significant share of its resources – about 30 per cent of total expenditure this year – to support defence, security and diplomacy efforts, he added.

"This spending is significant, but indispensable," he said, adding that even more would be spent if needed to safeguard Singapore.

Turning to the economy, Mr Heng said efforts to transform it are bearing fruit, with economic growth of 3.2 per cent last year.

All 23 Industry Transformation Maps, which cover about 80 per cent of the economy, have been launched, he said, noting that productivity has grown by 3.6 per cent a year for the past three years.

But with global growth expected to moderate this year in an increasingly uncertain climate, he outlined measures to help companies and workers build deep capabilities so that they can stay relevant amid a wave of disruption.

The Government will spend \$4.6 billion on this front over the next three years – \$3.6 billion to help workers and \$1 billion to strengthen companies.

Among the initiatives are a \$100

million fund to help small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) scale up, as well as more aid for them to go digital, and new programmes to help workers pick up skills in areas like prefabrication.

But Mr Heng also flagged uneven productivity growth across sectors, with the service sector seeing a 3 per cent growth in S Pass and work permit holders per year, or 34,000 in the last three years.

Calling this trend unsustainable, he said: "Our workforce growth is tapering, and if we do not use this narrow window to double down on restructuring, our companies will find it even harder in the future."

To that end, foreign worker quotas for the service sector will be tightened in two phases from next year, especially for S Pass holders.

Mr Heng also outlined several tar-

More on Budget 2019

At a glance: [TOP OF THE NEWS A2&3](#)

Honouring Merdeka Generation: [A4](#)

Fostering a stronger society: [A5&6](#)

Commentaries by Li Xueying and Vikram Khanna: [A7&10](#)

Supporting workers and firms: [A8-10](#)

Keeping S'pore safe and secure: [A12](#)

Drawing on past for the future: [A13](#)

Summing up the numbers: [A14](#)

Responding to the Budget: [A15](#)

Budget links past, present and future: [EDITORIAL A25](#)

Excerpts from Budget speech: [BUSINESS C2-4](#)

Despite these spending initiatives, Mr Heng also stressed the need to maintain fiscal discipline.

Recurrent revenues must meet recurrent spending in areas such as healthcare and defence, he said.

"Many countries have taken the easier route by funding these recurrent expenditures through borrowing. We must not do this, as such borrowing shifts the burden of paying for today's needs onto future generations. That is not the Singapore way," he said.

The tax system must hence be continually reviewed, he said, announcing that returning travellers will have a smaller allowance on tax-exempt overseas shopping and duty-free alcohol.

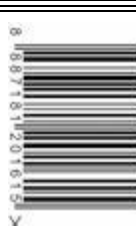
Overall, the Budget remains expansionary, with ministries expected to spend \$80.3 billion – 1.6 per cent higher than the year before. An overall deficit of \$3.5 billion is projected, which Mr Heng said will be funded by previous surpluses.

Singapore Business Federation chairman Teo Siong Seng said the Budget is a "well-balanced and progressive" one that encourages companies to continue to transform and prepare for the future.

Parliament will sit from next Tuesday to March 8, and MPs will debate the Budget as well as spending plans of the various ministries.

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BUDGET
2019

Briefing

Bicentennial Budget for...

There were episodes in the centuries of Singapore's history where our island's fortunes waned due to external forces. These are sobering reminders that we have to constantly build up our security and resilience, and plan long term.

Singapore's success has roots in our port, which thrives on openness and connectivity. These traits have been forged into our identity as a people... We turn our size and strategic location into an advantage...

Like Sang Kancil, the small but quick-witted mousedeer, we can make our way in the world.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEE KEAT



Lower-wage, older workers

At the heart of Singapore's economic transformation are workers, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat. "Our ultimate goal is to enable our people to continue to have good jobs and opportunities, and to be at their best."

A range of support measures have been rolled out in previous years to help workers reach their fullest potential, he noted.

Yesterday, he announced that lower-wage workers will get higher payouts under the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) next year.

Aimed at helping them supplement their income and Central Provident Fund savings, the enhanced WIS will see their maximum annual payouts increase by up to \$400. This will take effect from January next year.

The qualifying income cap for the programme will also be raised from the current \$2,000 to \$2,300 a month. Older workers will continue to get higher payouts than younger workers.

The higher WIS payouts will cost an additional \$206 million a year, bringing the total cost of the programme to \$1 billion a year. Almost 440,000 Singaporeans stand to benefit from this.

Meanwhile, the Special Employment Credit (SEC) and Additional SEC schemes, which incentivise and encourage employers to hire senior workers, will both be extended for another year, until Dec 31, 2020. The SEC scheme subsidises the wages of Singaporean workers aged 55 and above who earn up to \$4,000 a month, while the Additional SEC scheme encourages companies to hire workers who are above the re-employment age of 67.

To support the extensions, the SEC fund will be topped up by \$366 million.

Other worker initiatives include an additional WIS payment of at least \$100 for lower-income workers as part of the Bicentennial Bonus.

To help mid-career workers take up jobs in new growth areas, more Professional Conversion Programmes will be launched in blockchain, embedded software and prefabrication.

The Career Support Programme, which provides wage support for companies that hire mature and re-trenched Singaporeans or those in long-term unemployment, will also be extended by two years.

SEE A6



SME businesses

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) got quite a lot of attention at yesterday's Budget, with the Finance Minister talking about supporting start-ups, enabling firms to scale up and how Singapore must adopt an "enterprise-centric" approach.

Chief among the initiatives announced was a Scale-up SG programme which trade promotion agency Enterprise Singapore (ESG) will launch together with the private and public sectors. This will help high-growth local firms identify how they can innovate, grow and venture overseas. ESG will also run a two-year pilot to help firms get advice on innovation opportunities and ways to commercialise technology from experts known as "Innovation Agents".

To give more funding to SMEs, an additional \$100 million will be set aside for a new SME Co-Investment Fund III.

The eight financing programmes offered by ESG will also be streamlined into a single Enterprise Financing Scheme to be launched in October. This covers trade, working capital, fixed assets, venture

debt, mergers and acquisitions and project financing.

The Government will also expand the SMEs Go Digital programme to cover a larger number and a wider range of cost-effective, pre-approved digital solutions. This programme aims to help SMEs adopt digital technologies.

Three sectors – accountancy, sea transport and construction – will also get their own industry digital plans, with more sectors to be added later.

But it was not all good news for small and medium-sized enterprises. In the service sector, the Government will be tightening the Dependency Ratio Ceiling, or the proportion of foreign workers a firm can employ.

This will go from 40 per cent to 38 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 35 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

For the subset of S Pass workers – mid-skilled foreigners earning at least \$2,300 a month – the quota will be cut from 15 per cent to 13 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 10 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

SEE A9



Large firms

Large companies will get more help to tap emerging opportunities as Singapore positions itself as a "Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise", said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Singapore should be "Asia 101" for global multinational companies looking to expand into Asia, he said. At the same time, Singapore can be "Global 101" for regional companies ready to go international.

To draw greater value from trade networks, the Government will streamline and digitise trade processes further to raise efficiency. In this way, companies can get easier access to overseas markets and make better use of free trade agreements.

To encourage firms to embark on large-scale automation projects and raise productivity, the Automation Support Package will be ex-

tended for another two years, up to March 31, 2021.

There will also be an Investment Allowance of 100 per cent on the amount of approved capital expenditure, net of grants. The approved capital expenditure is capped at \$10 million per project.

Just like for smaller businesses, larger companies will have to brace themselves for the tightening of the Dependency Ratio Ceiling (DRC) in the service sector. DRC is the proportion of foreign workers a firm can employ, from 40 per cent to 38 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 35 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

For the subset of S Pass workers, the quota will be cut from 15 per cent to 13 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 10 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

SEE A10



Families with young children

Parents with school-going children will benefit from the Bicentennial Bonus, with additional support for their children's education.

There will be a one-off \$150 top-up to the Edusave accounts of primary and secondary school students aged seven to 16.

This is in addition to the annual Edusave contributions they already get from the Government, which this year will be \$230 for primary school pupils and \$290 for secondary students.

Students aged between 17 and 20 will get a one-off top-up to their Post-Secondary Education Accounts of either \$250 or \$500, depending on the value of their home.

The top-ups are expected to be made by mid-2019 and will benefit about 570,000 students. They are estimated to cost the Government \$140 million.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat also pointed out that the Government has been spending more on early education and care. It spent about \$1 billion in the preschool sector last year, more than 2½ times the \$360 million in 2012.

This support continues as a child grows, with the Government subsidising over 90 per cent of a child's education. "This means that a child entering primary school in 2019 will receive over \$130,000 in education subsidies by the time he or she completes secondary education," he said.

Children from lower-income homes get even more support through various schemes.

SEE A5



Older Singaporeans

The much-awaited goodies for the Merdeka Generation – Singaporeans born from 1950 to 1959 – were announced yesterday, and those in their 60s will have something to smile about.

- They get five key items:
- A \$100 top-up to Passion Silver cards, which can be used for healthy lifestyle activities like sports
- A yearly Medisave top-up of \$200 till 2023
- Additional subsidies for outpatient care for life
- Additional MediShield Life premium subsidies for life
- An additional participation incentive of \$1,500 for those who join CareShield Life.

To qualify, they must have become a citizen by 1996.

Those who were born before 1950 and missed out on the Pioneer Generation Package, but who became citizens by 1996, will also be eligible.

In addition, as part of the \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus, Singaporeans aged 50 to 64 years old this year will get a CPF top-up of up to \$1,000, if they have less than \$60,000 of retirement savings in their CPF accounts.

And older workers who are on the Workfare Income Supplement scheme will get higher increases in annual payouts from January next year. Those aged 60 and older will be able to get up to \$4,000 a year in payouts.

SEE A4



Low-income households

Lower-income Singaporeans continue to feature prominently in this year's Budget, with measures to commemorate the bicentennial geared largely to this group.

A \$200 million Bicentennial Community Fund will be set up to encourage Singaporeans to give back to those in need. The fund will provide dollar-to-dollar matching for donations garnered by Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) this year. The amounts matched will be capped so that more IPCs can benefit from the fund.

A Bicentennial Bonus was announced, featuring a special Bicentennial Bonus GST Voucher and Workfare Bicentennial Bonus to help the lower-income with daily expenses.

The Bicentennial Bonus GST Voucher will see those with assessable income of up to \$28,000 and who are aged 21 and above get \$300 if the annual value of their home is up to \$13,000, and \$150 if it is more than \$13,000 and up to \$21,000. This will benefit about

1.4 million Singaporeans.

Those who qualify for the Workfare Bicentennial Bonus will get a bonus of 10 per cent of the total annual Workfare Income Supplement payout for 2018.

Those with low CPF balances will also benefit from a top-up of up to \$1,000, depending on their age and balance, to help build up their retirement savings. This will cost about \$230 million and benefit about 300,000 citizens – the majority of them female.

Households with schoolgoing children will get more support from recently enhanced financial schemes, including the Uplift scholarship for independent schools, which will help cover out-of-pocket expenses.

And families in need of help with transport expenses will continue to be able to tap public transport vouchers, with a top-up to the Public Transport Fund.

SEE A5



Travellers

Bad news for travellers. Starting today, those returning from abroad will have a smaller allowance on tax-exempt overseas shopping.

Those who spend fewer than 48 hours outside Singapore will now avoid paying the 7 per cent goods and services tax (GST) only if the total value of items bought abroad is \$100 or less, down from \$150.

The threshold has also been lowered from \$600 to \$500 for travellers who spend 48 hours or more outside the country.

Meanwhile, the alcohol duty-free allowance for those who spend two days or more overseas will be reduced from 3 litres to 2 litres, starting on April 1.

The moves, which come amid rising international travel, are aimed at keeping Singapore's tax system resilient and contributing to recurrent spending needs.

SEE A13



Something for everyone

All taxpayers will get a personal income tax rebate of 50 per cent, capped at \$200 per taxpayer, as part of the Bicentennial Bonus.

Singaporeans who are aged 50 and above in 2019, and who do not receive the Merdeka or Pioneer Generation packages, will also get a Medisave top-up of \$100 a year, for the next five years, to help meet future healthcare expenses.

All Housing Board households will also receive rebates to offset between 1½ and 3½ months of service and conservancy charges, provided they do not have a member owning a private property.

Working mothers who engage the help of their parents, grandparents, or parents- or grandparents-in-law to look after their young children may also claim grandparent caregiver relief if their child is handicapped and unmarried, regardless of age. Currently, the child has to be 12 or below to claim such relief.

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BUDGET 2019

Honouring the Merdeka Generation

The Merdeka Generation will enjoy many key healthcare benefits for life. We hope that it will go some way in providing greater peace of mind for the Merdeka Generation and their families.

” FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Medisave top-up, Chas subsidies for Merdeka Generation

Most of \$6.1b set aside for package to ease healthcare costs of nearly 500,000 S’poreans

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

A total of \$6.1 billion will be set aside for the Merdeka Generation Package, the bulk of which will go towards easing the burden of healthcare costs for nearly 500,000 Singaporeans.

Announcing details of the much-talked-about package yesterday, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat called it a “gesture of our nation’s gratitude” for those in that generation, who were born between Jan 1, 1950, and Dec 31, 1959.

“It will provide them better peace of mind over future healthcare costs, while helping them to stay active and healthy,” he said.

Starting this year, those in the Merdeka Generation will receive a \$200 Medisave top-up every year until 2023.

They will also get higher subsidies under the Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) and an extra 25 per cent discount on their bills at polyclinics and public specialist outpatient clinics.

On top of that, they will get either 5 per cent or 10 per cent off their MediShield Life premiums, as well as an extra “participation incentive” of \$1,500 if they choose to join the national disability insurance scheme CareShield Life.

And to support this group’s active lifestyles, the Government will give them a one-off \$100 top-up to their PAssion Silver cards. This money can be used to pay for public transport, entry to public swimming pools and activities at community clubs, among other things.

Mr Heng estimated that the package will cost more than \$8 billion, in current dollars, over the Merdeka Generation beneficiaries’ lifetimes.

The \$6.1 billion set aside during this year’s Budget will, with in-

500k

Number of seniors who will benefit from Merdeka Generation Package.

terest accumulated over time, cover the package’s full projected costs, he said.

The oldest people in the Merdeka Generation are now 69 years old, and they will be able to enjoy the benefits of the package for many years, Mr Heng said.

He added that the finance and health ministries took this into account when sizing the budget for these benefits.

“This is a significant commitment by the Government,” Mr Heng said. “It is important that the Government of the day continues to monitor the patterns and cost of healthcare utilisation, and life expectancy over the next 30 years or more, so that the Government is able to meet this commitment.”

The Merdeka Generation Package comes five years after \$8 billion was set aside during Budget 2014 for the Pioneer Generation Package.

For those in the Merdeka Generation, Chas subsidies for common ailments, chronic conditions and dental procedures will be higher than what lower-income blue Chas card holders get.

They will be able to get these subsidies regardless of income, even if they do not have a Chas card today.

They will also receive an extra 5 per cent off their annual MediShield Life premiums, which will go up to 10 per cent after they turn 75.

And the new \$1,500 bonus for joining CareShield Life means that they will get a total of \$4,000 if they sign up for the insurance scheme, since the Health Ministry had previously announced a similar \$2,500 sign-up bonus for people born before 1960.

Mr Heng said this money will cover a “significant proportion” of their premiums, adding that he hopes this will encourage more people to join the scheme.

Those who missed out on the Merdeka Generation and Pioneer Generation packages will also get extra help, he said.

Singaporeans aged 50 years and above this year, and who are not eligible for either package, will get an extra Medisave top-up of \$100 a year for the next five years.

Those who were born in the 1950s and who obtained citizenship by 1996 will be eligible for the Merdeka Generation Package.

Those born in 1949 and earlier will also get the package if they missed out on the Pioneer Generation Package, as long as they obtained citizenship by 1996.

People who are eligible will be notified by April and start getting their Merdeka Generation cards from June. More details will be shared during the debate on the Health Ministry’s spending plans.

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MediShield Life premium subsidies

Those in the Merdeka Generation will get extra subsidies for MediShield Life premiums

Age next birthday (at policy renewal)	Additional subsidy	Subsidy amount*
60 to 75	5% of annual premiums	\$31.50 to \$48.75
76 and above	10% of annual premiums	\$113 to \$153

NOTE: *Based on 2019 standard MediShield Life premiums
Source: MINISTRY OF FINANCE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



Ms Barbara D'Cotta, 60, put her higher education dreams aside at age 19 and started work as a special needs teacher as she had to support herself and her mother. She had not felt until recently that her work had helped build a nation. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Special needs teacher grateful for healthcare benefits

Despite having worked for four decades as a special education teacher, Ms Barbara D'Cotta, 60, had not felt until recently that her work had helped build a nation.

“But the advertisements on the Merdeka Generation got me thinking, and when I looked around at many of my friends, I realised that they were actually pioneers in their own field,” she said.

She is glad about the Merdeka Generation Package. “It is very thoughtful of the Government to look into the needs of a genera-

tion like mine... Many of us did not go for higher education because of family needs or the lack of opportunities,” said Ms D'Cotta.

She could not pursue higher education when she wanted to as she had to start work as a special needs teacher at age 19 to support herself and her mother.

She went on to get a bachelor's degree in special education.

Ms D'Cotta, who is now studying for a master's degree, was hailed by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as “an excellent exam-

ple of lifelong learning and giving”.

She is determined to continue contributing to the community and mentor other teachers.

The healthcare subsidies and Medisave top-ups in the package would make up for the 10-year shortfall in her CPF savings when she stopped working to care for her two children, she said with a laugh. “It'll certainly come in handy now that we're all edging into our 60s!”

Cara Wong

Looking forward to more active ageing opportunities

While the Merdeka Generation Package includes a host of healthcare perks for those in their 60s, the benefits that excite Dr Jenny Quek most are the active ageing opportunities for seniors – be they for learning or volunteering.

“Lifelong learning and volunteering are very good because they give us the ability to contribute to society. Our generation is still quite fit, so we have a lot more to contribute,” said the 66-year-old.

In her voluntary role as the president of social service organisation Shan You, she has interacted with many Merdeka Generation members who are actively serving the community.



Dr Jenny Quek, 66, who serves as president of social service organisation Shan You, said she is looking forward to learning more new skills, with more volunteering or new learning opportunities. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SHAN YOU

“I see volunteering work as my national service. I contribute to my country and it makes me feel youthful to be able to lend a hand to those in need,” said Dr Quek, who also works part-time as a systems analyst and holds a doctorate in Buddhist psychology.

With more of such volunteering or new learning opportunities, enthusiasts can tap them to enrich themselves, said Dr Quek, adding that she is looking forward to learning more new skills.

She said she is also grateful for the extra healthcare perks in the

package. While she has no need for them now, she is happy to receive a top-up to her Medisave account.

“I appreciate whatever the Government is trying to do for my generation.”

Cara Wong

Correspondent's take

Merdeka package more generous than expected



Salma Khalik

Senior Health Correspondent

The Merdeka Generation (MG) Package for Singaporeans born in the 1950s has turned out to be more generous than anticipated.

All seniors from this generation will get a \$100 top-up to their PAssion Silver cards as well as an additional \$1,500 if they opt in to CareShield Life when it is open to them from 2021.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had said that the MG Package would be less generous than the Pioneer Generation (PG) Package.

This is only fair as the PG was around in the early days of nationhood and would have lower savings than the younger MG, and, hence, requires more help.

The MG is getting somewhat similar benefits but at a lower rate.

The MG card provides subsidies at Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) clinics that sit somewhere between what the PG gets and what a blue Chas card gives.

The MG gets an additional 25 per cent off medicine and services at public clinics.

The MG will also get top-ups of \$200 a year in the Medisave accounts, but only for five years. This is fair as the MG will live longer and hence collect benefits for many more years than the PG.

Those in the MG will also get 5 per cent to 10 per cent subsidies for their MediShield Life premiums. Again, much lower than that for the

PG, but those in the MG would have more in their Medisave to pay for this. All in the MG will get these benefits, with those who get means-tested help continuing to receive it.

What they will not be getting, though, is the \$100 a month for life should they become disabled.

That is because those in the MG, unlike those in the PG, were young enough to join ElderShield when it was launched. Instead, they are being offered an additional \$1,500 to encourage them to switch from ElderShield to CareShield Life.

This came as a very pleasant surprise as those in the MG already get the “participation” bonus of \$2,500 announced earlier.

Now those who join CareShield Life, which pays \$600 a month for life should they become disabled, will get a total of \$4,000 off the premiums they will have to pay over a 10-year period.

Being part of the MG, this could tilt the scales in deciding whether I opt in for CareShield Life.

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BUDGET
2019

Fostering a stronger society

From time to time, when our finances allow, we share the surpluses with Singaporeans, and provide more help to those with specific needs. With this Bonus, I hope all Singaporeans, young and old, will join us to commemorate this significant moment in Singapore's history.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT



The Bicentennial Bonus and Bicentennial Community Fund are initiatives that will be launched to mark the bicentennial year. The Bicentennial Bonus includes GST Voucher cash payouts for lower-income Singaporeans, personal income tax rebates for all tax resident individuals and CPF top-ups for older citizens. ST FILE PHOTO

\$1.1b Bicentennial Bonus, with focus on helping lower-income

\$200m Bicentennial Community Fund will also be set up to spur S'poreans to give back

Rahimah Rashith

To commemorate the bicentennial year, a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus will be shared with Singaporeans, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

The bonus is part of two initiatives that will be launched to commemorate the year, with the other being a Bicentennial Community Fund.

As part of the Bicentennial Bonus, 1.4 million lower-income Singaporeans will receive up to \$300 through a GST Voucher cash payout.

The bicentennial payment, which will be received at the end of the year, is meant to help them with their daily living expenses.

Lower-income workers who receive Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) payments will also get a Workfare Bicentennial Bonus.

They will receive an additional 10 per cent of their WIS payment for work done last year, with a minimum payment of \$100, in cash.

A total of 407,000 low-wage workers received WIS payouts totalling \$650 million in 2017.

For all tax resident individuals, personal income tax rebates of 50 per cent will also be granted.

The rebate will be capped at \$200 per taxpayer and is estimated to cost about \$280 million.

Parents with school-going children will also benefit from the bonus, with additional support for

their children's education.

There will be a one-off \$150 top-up to the Edusave accounts of Singaporean students aged seven to 16.

Singaporeans aged between 17 and 20 will receive \$500 in their Post Secondary Education Accounts.

The education top-ups are expected to be made by the middle of this year and are estimated to cost \$140 million. Altogether, 570,000 students are expected to benefit from the top-ups.

For those who are near retirement, additional Central Provident Fund (CPF) top-ups will be made available.

Singaporeans aged 50 to 64 this year and who have less than \$60,000 of retirement savings in their CPF accounts will receive a top-up of up to \$1,000. This will be credited into the Special Account for members aged 50 to 54, and the Retirement Account for mem-

Bicentennial Bonus for older Singaporeans

\$300 to \$1,000 CPF top-up for older Singaporeans with lower CPF balances

Age in 2019	Top-ups for those with combined CPF Ordinary and Special Account* or Retirement Account** balances as at Dec 31, 2018	
	Up to \$30,000	Above \$30,000 but less than \$60,000
50 to 54	\$500	\$300
55 to 64	\$1,000	\$600

NOTE: Eligibility criteria:

• Accessible Income for Year of Assessment 2018 not more than \$28,000

• Annual Value of home as at Dec 31, 2018 not more than \$21,000

• Do not own more than one property

* For CPF members aged 50 to 55 in 2019

** For CPF members aged 56 to 64 in 2019

Source: MINISTRY OF FINANCE
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

bers aged 55 to 64.

About 300,000 Singaporeans will benefit from the top-up. "The

majority of these recipients will be women. Many of them left the workforce early and took up impor-

tant roles as mothers, caregivers or housewives," said Mr Heng. "As a result, they had fewer years to build up their savings. This top-up is a way to recognise their contributions and to help them save more."

Besides the Bicentennial Bonus, a \$200 million Bicentennial Community Fund will also be set up to encourage Singaporeans to give back. The fund will provide dollar-to-dollar matching for donations garnered by Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) this year.

The amounts matched for each IPC will be capped to ensure that more IPCs can benefit from the fund. Donations made to IPCs qualify for a 250 per cent tax deduction.

Mr Heng said: "We hope to further encourage more Singaporeans, including younger Singaporeans, to embrace the spirit of giving back."

Ms Iris Lin, senior assistant director of Fei Yue Community Services, welcomed the initiatives. She said that the additional help for lower-income and older Singaporeans is a nice gesture.

"The amount, no matter how big or small, will go a long way to help the low-income. This is also a nice way to recognise the hard work that older Singaporeans have put in, including women who may have had to stop working because of care giving."

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Additional \$3.1b for long-term care; more to get Chas subsidies

Felicia Choo

The Government will pump in an additional \$3.1 billion for long-term care schemes and will enhance Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) subsidies.

The additional funds for long-term care build on the \$2 billion earmarked last year for premium subsidies and other forms of support for Singaporeans.

The \$5.1 billion will go into a new Long-Term Care Support Fund that will fund subsidies for disability insurance CareShield Life and other long-term care support measures.

These include ElderFund, which will be launched next year to help severely disabled, lower-income Singaporeans who need additional financial support for long-term care and might not be able to join CareShield Life, or have low Medisave balances.

"As we age, the chances of having one form of disability or another rises significantly," Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) estimates that one in two healthy Singaporeans aged 65 could become severely disabled in their lifetime and may need long-term care, he said.

Mr Heng also shared more details on the extension of Chas, which was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at last year's National Day Rally.

The scheme will be extended to all Singaporeans who have chronic conditions, regardless of income.

Currently, Chas subsidises medical and dental care at general practi-

tioners and dental clinics for lower- and middle-income Singaporeans, as well as those from the Pioneer Generation, or Singaporeans who were aged 16 and older in 1965.

In addition, those with the orange Chas card (people who have a household monthly income per person of between \$1,101 and \$1,800) who now get subsidies only for chronic conditions will also get subsidies for common illnesses like cough and cold. Subsidies for complex chronic conditions will also be increased.

These changes will see an expected increase in payouts for Chas subsidies to more than \$200 million a year, said Mr Heng.

In 2017, the Government disbursed about \$154 million in Chas subsidies to about 650,000 Singaporeans. The number of Chas card holders grew five times to about 1.3 million Singaporeans from 2012 to 2017. The amount spent on the scheme also grew more than 10 times over this period.

"Chas makes it possible for more Singaporeans to turn to GP clinics near their homes to manage their chronic conditions," said Mr Heng.

"But we must also put in the measures to ensure that Chas clinics are delivering good outcomes."

To do this, MOH will study how to help Chas clinics better track their patients' progress and outcomes, and review its clinical guidelines for care at Chas dental clinics.

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong will provide more details on these changes during the upcoming debate on his ministry's budget.

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Pei Hwa Presbyterian Primary School pupils on their way to school. Singaporean primary and secondary school students will receive a \$150 top-up to their Edusave accounts this year, in addition to the yearly contributions. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

More being spent to give children a good start in life through education

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

A child entering primary school last year would have received more than \$130,000 in education subsidies by the time he or she finishes secondary school.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat disclosed this in Parliament yesterday as he outlined initiatives to help Singaporeans access opportunities and fulfil their potential through education.

"The Government subsidises over 90 per cent of the total cost of educating our children," he said, adding that more help is given to lower-income families.

These efforts, he said, are part of the long-term plan to build a more caring and inclusive society by giving children a good start in life and providing Singaporeans access to

opportunities throughout their lives, amid challenges such as maintaining social mobility.

He said the Government invests heavily to provide a "world-class education for young Singaporeans" to bring out the best in every child.

Noting that support for children in need is an area of deep concern for many Singaporeans, he said this starts with ensuring quality pre-schools remain accessible and affordable for all families.

"Pre-schools support parents in laying a strong foundation for children – by helping to develop children's cognitive, language, social and emotional skills," he said.

And the Government is spending more on early childhood education and care, he added.

It pumped in about \$1 billion in the pre-school sector last year, more than 2½ times of the \$360

million it spent in 2012.

He said more has been done to support those from disadvantaged backgrounds by allowing more students to benefit from financial assistance, earlier intervention and new forms of help.

One such way, he said, is KidStart, a government scheme to help disadvantaged children through health, learning and developmental support. Since the pilot programme started in 2016, more than 900 families have been on it.

Last year, another initiative called Uplift, short for Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce, was set up to study issues that affect children from poorer homes and their families, said Mr Heng.

The Uplift scholarship, announced in December last year, will provide \$800 per year for eligible lower-income students in

independent schools to cover out-of-pocket expenses, he said.

"The task force is also looking at how to strengthen after-school care and support for disadvantaged students in school-based Student Care Centres," he said, adding that more details will be disclosed during the debate on the Education Ministry's spending plans.

To help parents with school-going children, Mr Heng also announced that Singaporean primary and secondary school students will receive a \$150 top-up to their Edusave accounts this year.

This is on top of the annual Edusave contributions that the Government already provides – \$230 for primary school pupils and \$290 for secondary school students.

In addition, Singaporeans aged 17 to 20 will get up to \$500 in their post-secondary education accounts, which they can use to pursue post-secondary courses in the universities and polytechnics, for instance.

"This will go towards helping parents to save for their children's tertiary education," said Mr Heng.

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**BUDGET
2019****Fostering a stronger society**

The Government keeps a close watch on the cost of living. Over the years, we have done much to alleviate cost pressures – whether in healthcare, education or day-to-day expenses. Good macroeconomic management has enabled us to keep inflation low, while the Singapore dollar has been strengthening over time.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Increased support for lower-wage and senior workers

Higher Workfare payouts for the low income; subsidies for wages of seniors to be extended**Adrian Lim**
Political Correspondent

Lower-wage workers will receive higher payouts under a government scheme to help them supplement their income and Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings.

The qualifying income cap for the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) programme will also be raised from the current \$2,000 to \$2,300 per month, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat announced yesterday.

With the enhanced WIS, to take effect from January next year, the maximum annual payouts will be increased by up to \$400, and older workers will see higher increases in payouts. Those eligible for WIS receive payout amounts based on their age and income.

For example, 60-year-old work-

ers earning \$1,200 a month can currently receive \$3,600 annually from WIS, but with the enhancement, this will be boosted to \$4,000. They will continue to receive 40 per cent of WIS in cash and 60 per cent in their CPF.

WIS, which was introduced in 2007, is a key pillar of Singapore's social security system and supports workers whose earnings are in the bottom 20 per cent, as well as those slightly above.

Mr Heng said: "The scheme has raised their incomes, encouraged employment and helped them save more for retirement."

He said the enhanced WIS is expected to cost close to \$1 billion a year, and will benefit almost 440,000 Singaporeans.

Meanwhile, to support older workers, the Special Employment Credit (SEC) and the Additional SEC scheme, which incentivise and

encourage employers to hire senior workers, will both be extended for another year, until Dec 31 next year.

The SEC subsidises the wages of Singaporean workers aged 55 and above who earn up to \$4,000 a month, while the Additional SEC encourages companies to hire workers who are above the re-employment age of 67.

To support the extensions, the SEC fund will be topped up by \$366 million, Mr Heng noted.

He said a tripartite workgroup set up to study the concerns of older workers will present its recommendations later this year.

The workgroup is reviewing policies such as the retirement and re-employment age, and CPF contribution rates for older workers.

The Government will also review the relevance and structure of the SEC and Additional SEC, in tandem with recommendations

For example, 60-year-old workers earning \$1,200 a month can currently receive \$3,600 annually from WIS, but with the enhancement, this will be boosted to \$4,000. They will continue to receive 40 per cent of WIS in cash and 60 per cent in their CPF.

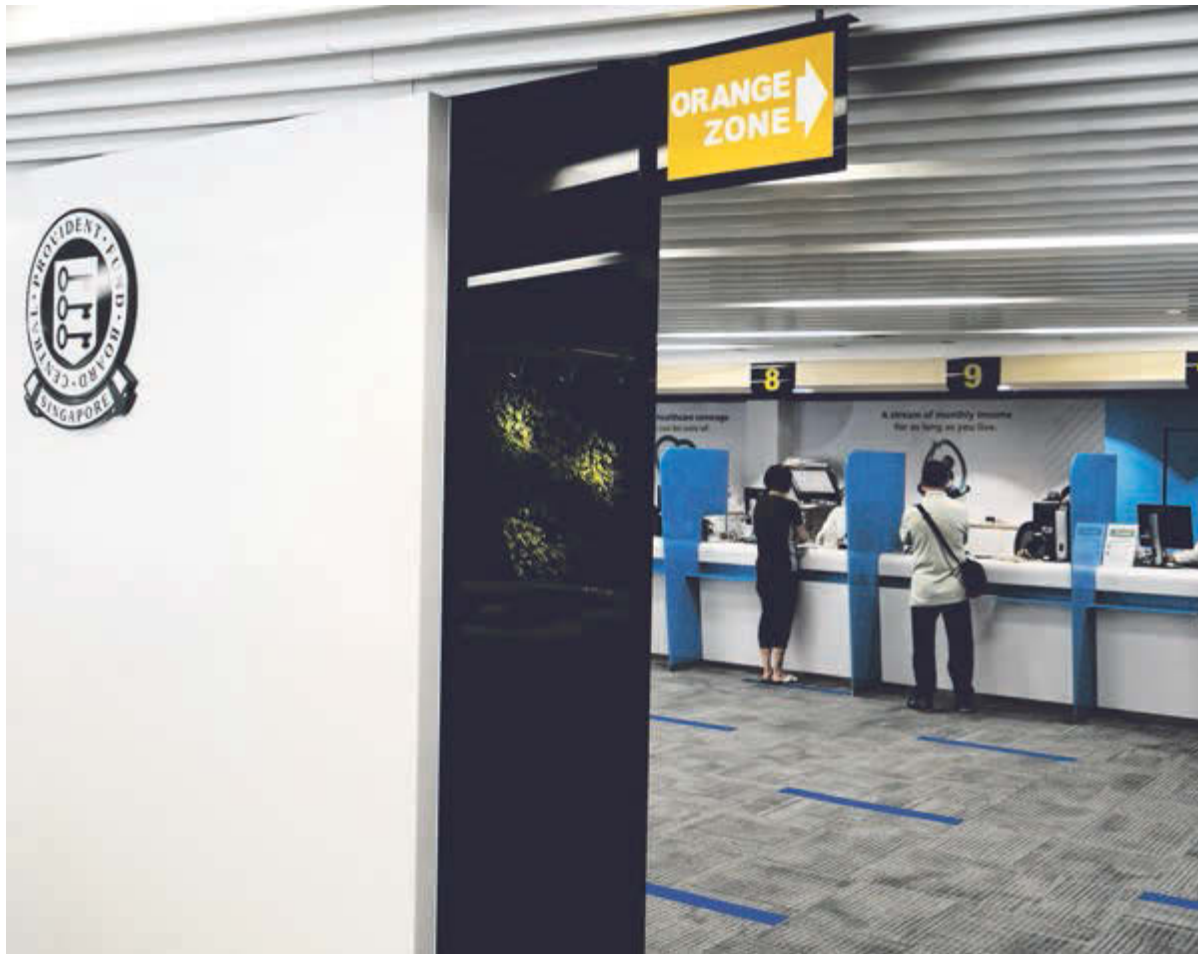
from the tripartite workgroup.

"With a tighter labour market, and more Singaporeans choosing to work longer, more companies will be hiring older workers. The Government will study better forms of support to continue to help workers to remain productive, earn more and save more for retirement," he said.

Yesterday, Mr Heng also announced a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus for Singaporeans. As part of it, lower-income Singaporeans will receive additional payments from the WIS at the end of this year, to help them with daily living expenses.

The Workfare Bicentennial Bonus will give these individuals an additional 10 per cent of their WIS payment for work done last year, with a minimum payment of \$100. This will be given in cash.

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A tripartite workgroup is reviewing policies such as Central Provident Fund contribution rates for older workers. It will present its recommendations later this year, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

Correspondent's take

When personal and social responsibility can be mutually reinforcing

**Janice Tai**

Social Affairs Correspondent

There was much chatter on the issue of inequality last year, as fears of a widening income divide and declining social mobility dominated national conversations.

Singapore's social policy today is targeted at reducing inequality and fostering conditions that allow for greater inclusion and well-being.

This year's Budget shows that the Government has chosen to act both upstream – by trying to shape and encourage certain behaviours – and downstream – in dealing with the fallout by cushioning the impact on those who have been left behind.

A significant upstream intervention is enhancing Workfare to better support lower-wage workers.

The Workfare scheme is a key pillar in our social security system and seeks to supplement income and mitigate inequality in the working years. Almost 440,000 Singaporeans will benefit from the top-ups to their wages.

Yet, the Government recognises that the impact of inequality can stretch up to the retirement years and affect one's financial security in those latter years.

So, it is also putting in place further support downstream to pad up welfare handouts to the elderly who cannot work and have little family support. Those on the ComCare long-term assistance scheme will get higher monthly cash assistance.

What is refreshing is seeing that unpaid caregiving work has not been forgotten, and having the contributions of women recognised through a top-up of up to \$1,000 for older Singaporeans with less than \$60,000 of retirement savings in their Central Provident Fund accounts.

Most recipients are women who have left the workforce early to be mothers, caregivers or housewives. While a modest gesture, it sends the right signal.

Addressing economic issues both upstream and downstream aside, what would determine Singapore's success in shifting to a more inclusive society is in how it builds up a culture of people willing to support others, while not undermining personal responsibility.

So, it is reassuring to see the Government trying to encourage a spirit of volunteerism in the community by walking the talk itself first.

Under a new Public Service Cares initiative, all public officers are being nudged to volunteer on a more regular basis.

This is an enlightened move, as it will not only provide more hands on deck to meet the needs of the vulnerable, but also help public officers to be more empathetic and aware of the needs on the ground. This may, in turn, inform the way they craft or deliver policies.

These Budget measures to alleviate inequality and shore up a culture of giving and service show that the interplay of personal and social responsibility can be mutually reinforcing and need not be a zero-sum game.

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Public Assistance recipients to get more each month

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs Correspondent

Destitute Singaporeans who are on the ComCare Long-Term Assistance Scheme, also known as the Public Assistance scheme, can look forward to a higher monthly cash sum.

For instance, a two-person household will receive an extra \$130 a month – from \$870 to \$1,000 a month.

The scheme provides a cash sum each month to destitute persons who cannot work permanently as a result of old age or illness, and have little or no family support.

In the Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) last financial year ended March last year, there were 4,409 households on the scheme, with its recipients being mostly elderly singles who live alone.

The sums were last revised in 2016, when they went up from \$450 to \$500 a month for a single person and from \$790 to \$870 for a two-person household.

The MSF will provide more details during the debate on the ministry's budget next month.

Social workers interviewed welcomed the increase in sums to Public Assistance recipients.

Ms Joyz Tan, 37, senior social worker at Fei Yue Family Service Centre, said: "The increase in quantum helps to cushion the impact of inflation to some extent, such as higher food cost."

Besides the higher sums given out to Public Assistance scheme recipients, the Government will also increase the sums for those on the



Dr Rose Sivam and her husband Chris Choo run a private dining initiative from their five-room HDB flat, where they have hosted guests, including people with disabilities and dementia patients, who get a free meal and entertainment. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat has urged Singaporeans to make a difference, under a national movement called SG Cares, to foster a more caring society. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROSE SIVAM

government pension scheme called Singapore Allowance, who draw pensions of less than \$1,230 a month.

The Government will raise the allowance and the monthly pension ceiling by \$20 each, to \$320 and \$1,250 a month, respectively. The move will benefit about 9,300 pensioners.

The Public Transport Fund will also be topped up by \$10 million. Eligible lower-income families will get vouchers to defray their transport expenses.

Finance Minister Heng Swee

Keat also urged Singaporeans to make a difference, under a national movement called SG Cares, to foster a more caring society.

The Government is promoting volunteerism among various groups, such as young people, seniors and among public officers.

For example, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth is working with Youth Corps Singapore to nurture youth community leaders in tertiary education institutes to rally their peers to be involved in the community.

It is also encouraging all public of-

ficers to volunteer under the Public Service Cares initiative, and over 85 per cent of public officers are making monthly donations.

Mr Heng cited independent content producer Rose Sivam, 54, who started an initiative to bring people from different backgrounds together, including the less fortunate. She and her husband Chris Choo, 50, run a private dining initiative from their five-room HDB flat, and they want to extend these parties to those who cannot afford them or do not have a chance to attend private dining parties.

Guests to her "My Home, Your Home" initiative have included people with disabilities and dementia patients, who get a free meal and entertainment. Paying guests put in between \$78 and \$88 per head.

"Those who came all loved it," Dr Sivam said. "And the privileged also gained so much – like some did not know wheelchair users can hold full-time jobs or have never seen a visually handicapped person create calligraphy. Their misconceptions have been cleared."

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BUDGET
2019

Commentary

Something for everyone amid a challenging environment

Handouts aside, other measures also stand out for their foresight and compassion



Li Xueying

Budget 2019 was not an easy one to deliver. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat presented it in an environment that was not the most congenial to the Government.

First, it came in the wake of a series of incidents that has raised the political temperature – the HIV and SingHealth data breaches and the national service training deaths, to name a few. Just over the weekend, another lapse came to light: 7,700 people received the wrong amount of healthcare subsidies due to an IT glitch.

These erupted amid long-term challenges that are political hot potatoes – rising cost of living and stratifying social mobility among them.

At the same time, Budget 2019 was loaded with expectations, for Mr Heng in particular.

While this was his fourth Budget outing as Finance Minister, it was his first as the designated successor to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.



Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat arriving at Parliament House to deliver his 2019 Budget statement yesterday. In his two-hour speech, Mr Heng called for Singaporeans to be united in the face of challenges. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

His performance was assessed as coming from the man who will lead the nation in future, and parsed for clues for an inkling of his vision.

How then did the Finance Minister do?

There are the short-term handouts that will make most voters happy.

The centrepiece is the widely

flagged \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation bonanza that half a million Singaporeans in their 60s will get. But there is something for almost everyone else: a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus for mainly lower-income workers; a 50 per cent personal income tax rebate for middle-income earners; Edusave top-ups and more for students.

Taken together, these goodies help assuage worries about rising cost of living. “The Government keeps a close watch on the cost of living,” Mr Heng made clear.

Handouts aside, there were other measures that stood out for their compassion and foresight.

Singapore’s version of the minimum wage and the most

critical safety net for low-income workers – the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) – will be improved. The qualifying income cap will be raised from \$2,000 to \$2,300, and maximum annual payouts hiked by up to \$400.

This is an important move. Incomes have been rising in tandem with inflation, and this change will ensure that the bottom 20 per cent will continue to be helped.

Also noteworthy was Mr Heng’s frank assessment that Singapore is not doing as well as it should in increasing productivity on some fronts.

Thus, the quota for foreign workers in the service sector will be tightened. This will be painful for the 200,000 establishments in industries such as retail and business services and they are bound to belly-ache at it.

But the move sent a strong signal that the People’s Action Party (PAP) Government has its eye firmly on the long term when it comes to policymaking.

In no uncertain terms, Mr Heng warned: “If we do not use this narrow window to double down on restructuring, our companies will find it even harder in the future.”

Social mobility – a topic that the fourth-generation leadership has pledged to moved decisively on – however received surprisingly short shrift in this Budget. Mr Heng touched briefly on existing efforts such as more support for pre-schools and the KidStart scheme for disadvantaged kids. Hopefully, more will be announced during the ensuing debate on the Education Ministry’s budget.

Those concerned about whether there is a truly level playing field for all Singaporeans, regardless of their family backgrounds, will hold him to his word. “We are improving the lives of our people, by enabling them to be the best that they can be,” said Mr Heng, in a line worthy of a future National Day Rally.

So to what extent did Singapore’s next prime minister inspire?

Never a flamboyant speaker, there were few flourishes in Mr Heng’s speech. He made some gentle quips, such as when he highlighted a local product, a screen protector that allows long-sighted users to use digital devices without need for glasses.

“I am sure this House will support the enabling of us to see issues, far or near, with greater clarity,” he said, to chuckles in the chamber.

He also used a favourite line – “low risk does not mean no risk” – in a nod to his stroke in 2015, when calling on Singaporeans to take care of their health.

Mr Heng did not address the latest lapses that have dominated news headlines and chatter on the ground, and which have raised questions about the competency of certain agencies.

But the Budget speech is not the platform to address such concerns, which no doubt will get an airing in Parliament on another occasion.

What did come through in Mr Heng’s two-hour speech was his repeated call for Singaporeans to be united – whether in the face of external challenges such as with Malaysia, or in weaving a tightly knit social fabric at home.

That, in fact, was the title of his speech: Building A Strong, United Singapore.

This harks back to a belief that Mr Heng has consistently held and had raised when he first plunged into the political arena in 2011.

In an interview with The Straits Times then, he said: “I’m deeply convinced that we need to build a cohesive community, and we need to build trust – a deep level of trust between the Government and our people.”

Singaporeans will be looking forward to hearing more on this from Mr Heng.

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BUDGET
2019

Supporting our workers and firms

Economic transformation is critical. We expect to spend \$4.6 billion over the next three years on the new and enhanced economic capability-building measures in Budget 2019, and to support Singaporean workers. \$3.6 billion will go towards helping our workers... \$1 billion will go towards helping firms build deep enterprise capabilities.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Service sector firms will have to lower foreign worker ratio

Proportion will be cut from 40% to 38% on Jan 1 next year, and to 35% on Jan 1, 2021

Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

Companies will have to rely less on foreign workers and become more productive if the service sector is to remain competitive.

That has led to the Dependency Ratio Ceiling – the proportion of foreigners on work permits or S Passes a firm can employ – being cut from 40 per cent to 38 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 35 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

The quota for S Pass workers – mid-skilled foreigners paid at least \$2,300 a month – will drop from 15 per cent to 13 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 10 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

The last quota reductions for the sector were in 2013.

Firms that already exceed the new levels will have to meet the quotas when applying for permit renewals.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said the decision to reduce the quota was done “after much deliberation”.

Although some companies – such as those in manufacturing – have done well to deploy staff efficiently, service segments such as retail and food and beverage remain very labour-intensive, he added.

Growth in the number of S Pass and work permit holders in services has been picking up pace. It rose by about 3 per cent a year, or 34,000 in the past three years.

Indeed, the increase in the number of S Pass holders in services last year was the highest in five years.

These trends may be unsustainable, noted Mr Heng. “We need to act decisively to manage the man-

power growth in services, and encourage our companies to revamp work processes, redesign jobs and reskill our workers,” he said.

“Our workforce growth is tapering, and if we do not use this narrow window to double down on restructuring, our companies will find it even harder in the future.”

Mr Heng said a sustainable inflow of foreign workers is needed to complement local staff while Singaporean workers upgrade themselves and enterprises build deep capabilities.

Higher funding of up to 70 per cent under two grants will be extended to March 31, 2023, to help firms adjust to the changes.

These are the Enterprise Development Grant (EDG), which funds projects for firms to improve efficiency and internationalise, and the Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG), which subsidises the cost of off-the-shelf technology to help companies boost productivity.

The funding cap of 70 per cent had been due to drop to 50 per cent after March 31 next year for the EDG and for certain sectors under the PSG.

The Ministry of Manpower also provides some flexibility for compa-

nies to employ more foreign workers while they move to an operating model requiring fewer employees under the Lean Enterprise Development Scheme. There is also provision on a case-by-case basis if firms need to bring in foreign workers with specialised skills that are lacking among Singaporeans.

Meanwhile, there will be no changes to the foreign worker levy rates this year.

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said in a Facebook post yesterday that if service industries remain very labour-intensive and see too much growth in foreign manpower, job quality may not improve significantly and workers will face poorer wage growth prospects.

But she noted that there is a global skills shortage in areas such as artificial intelligence and data science, and so Singapore must still welcome top professionals from overseas to complement local talent.

PwC Singapore tax leader Chris Woo and OCBC economist Selena Ling said the lower service-sector quota will probably force enterprises to turn more to technology. Mr Woo called it “necessary medicine” for the medium term.

Maybank Kim Eng senior economist Chua Hak Bin said the changes could lead to higher costs as firms may need to raise wages to attract locals in the tight labour market.

High-tech solutions are not always an immediate boost. Yee Cheong Yuen Noodle Restaurant director Veronica Koh said that as her customer base is older, they are not so keen to use the iPad ordering system she tried to implement. But she said that with the quota being tightened, she will have to keep trying. “We will probably look to automation and a range of government support to help us cope.”

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More help to boost skills and switch jobs

More help is coming to improve the skills of workers so that they can adapt in the competitive and technology-intensive environment.

The initiatives include new conversion programmes relating to fields such as blockchain and prefabrication to assist people who want to switch to jobs in growth areas.

Another step noted in the Budget is to extend the Career Support Programme that was to end next month by two years.

The scheme subsidises the wages when a Singaporean who is mature and retrenched or unemployed for the long term is hired for a professional, manager, executive or technician job.

“Our ultimate goal is to enable our people to continue to have good jobs and opportunities, and to be at their best,” said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

The Budget has set aside \$3.6 billion over the next three years for the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Education to help workers amid industry and technological disruptions.

About \$1.1 billion was spent on career support initiatives, such as the Adapt and Grow programmes, and continuing education and training, in the 2017 financial year.

The push to help workers adapt and gain skills has borne fruit, with around 76,000 job seekers finding work through Adapt and Grow programmes between 2016 and last year.

More people are also going for

training, with the participation rate growing from 35 per cent in 2015 to 48 per cent last year among Singaporeans and permanent residents in the labour force.

Workers, firms, unions and trade associations and chambers all need to play a part to continue this progress, said Mr Heng.

Two grants for businesses will include new components to ensure that staff benefit from transformation in their companies.

Firms that want to tap the Enterprise Development Grant to lift efficiency and internationalise will need to commit to positive outcomes for workers, such as wage rises, from April 1 next year.

The Productivity Solutions Grant will allow firms to apply for a subsidy of up to 70 per cent of out-of-pocket training expenses, capped at \$10,000. They must submit a training plan for assessment.

Details on the grant changes will be given later.

Joanna Seow

The Budget has set aside \$3.6 billion over the next three years for the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Education to help workers amid industry and technological disruptions.

Tech officer upgrades skills and now leads engineers

Sue-Ann Tan

Mr Abdul Jalil Idros started working in energy company YTL PowerSeraya in 1995.

Back then, he was a technical officer carrying out maintenance and repair works related to instrumentation and the control system.

Now, after going through training and getting his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in electrical engineering, Mr Abdul Jalil, 46, has moved from repair works to taking charge of plant upgrading projects.

He is now a senior engineer who leads a team of engineers and helps provide regular on-the-job training for staff. He also leads overhaul and maintenance works for the plant and is involved in new developmental projects.

His journey in upgrading his skills and taking on new job scopes was mentioned by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in the Budget speech yesterday.

Mr Heng said workers need to “embrace upskilling and reskilling, and make the most of new opportunities both locally and overseas”.



Thanks to his skills upgrading and training, Mr Abdul Jalil Idros moved from carrying out maintenance and repair works at YTL PowerSeraya to taking charge of plant upgrading projects. He leads overhaul and maintenance works for the plant and is involved in new developmental projects. PHOTO: YTL POWERSERAYA

He added that firms must step up training and job redesign for their workers as they know the skills workers need as their respective sectors evolve.

Mr Abdul Jalil told The Straits Times: “Continuous training and up-

skilling are important in order to keep myself relevant in my workplace so that I can add value and help YTL PowerSeraya grow.”

Over the years, he has picked up various skills related to his work.

He learnt to carry out both hard-

ware and software engineering works in the distributed control system, which included troubleshooting, software logic modification and rectification of plant works.

He has also learnt to implement and maintain measures to counter

increasing cyber-security threats.

Rather than stay in the same job roles, Mr Abdul Jalil has rotated through the firm to broaden his experience and build new skills. His willingness to keep learning and upgrading earned him the SkillsFu-

ture Fellowships Award last year.

Mr Abdul Jalil said: “(Continuous training) will also enhance my confidence level and help me perform my task efficiently.”

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Correspondent’s take

Giving service sector a nudge to boost productivity



Joanna Seow

Manpower Correspondent

It has been six years since the last tightening of the foreign worker quota in the service sector, but companies are about to feel the squeeze again.

At most, 40 per cent of their staff can be foreign now, but the ratio will go down to 35 per cent by 2021.

The measure is aimed at raising the competitiveness of the sector, which lags significantly behind the manufacturing sector in productivity.

Last year, productivity growth in

real value added per actual hour worked was just 2.2 per cent in the service sector, compared with 9.8 per cent in manufacturing.

Construction productivity grew by 2 per cent, according to figures in the Economic Survey of Singapore.

Certain service industries such as finance and insurance and accommodation did better.

But the food and beverage and retail industries were picked out by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as segments that remain very

labour-intensive.

Some progress has been made – iPad-ordering systems are becoming more common in restaurants, and more retailers are using RFID (radio-frequency identification) to track their products behind the scenes. But technology is not being used widely or innovatively enough. Perhaps more can be done to showcase new ideas and best practices to spark interest among companies.

Boosting productivity in the

service sector is critical as it employs the bulk of workers here, even as companies continue to grapple with a shortage of local manpower.

Already, the quota in the service sector is the tightest of all the sectors. The quotas range from 60 per cent for manufacturing to 87.5 per cent for the construction and process sectors.

But a common gripe among service-sector companies with more manual jobs is that Singaporeans are not interested in

such roles due to the long hours, unpleasant work conditions or lack of a career path.

With the tighter quotas, bosses will be forced to move faster to upgrade jobs and improve the work conditions to draw more locals.

They may also need to spend more to pay better wages or invest in technology and automation. The result of this is that consumers may need to pay a little more for their goods and services.

It will take some time for companies, workers and consumers to adjust to these changes. But the main gainers will be Singaporeans if the measures help boost service standards.

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BUDGET
2019

Supporting our workers and firms

Our ultimate goal is to enable our people to continue to have good jobs and opportunities, and to be at their best. Hence, the second thrust of our economic transformation is to deepen the capabilities of our workers.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

\$4.6b over three years to help workers and boost businesses

\$3.6b will be used to assist workers during industrial disruptions; help for start-ups, SMEs

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

Around \$4.6 billion will be invested to boost businesses and support Singaporean workers over the next three years.

Of this, \$3.6 billion will be earmarked to assist workers during industrial disruptions, while \$1 billion will enable firms to grow their deep enterprise capabilities.

"But let me emphasise that supporting companies and supporting workers are mutually reinforcing," Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday. "Stronger companies provide better jobs and pay for workers, and highly skilled workers make companies stronger."

Start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises will also get help:

- A Scale-up SG programme by trade promotion agency Enterprise Singapore (ESG) that aims to help high-growth local firms innovate, grow and venture overseas.
- A two-year pilot where firms can get advice on innovation opportunities and ways to commercialise technology from "Innovation Agents" – industry veterans with expertise in technology and business.
- An additional \$100 million for a new SME Co-Investment Fund III to help companies draw in "smart, patient capital that attracts investors with the expertise and the right time horizon". The fund is expected to bring in another \$200 million for SMEs during fund-raising.
- An Enterprise Financing Scheme, to be launched in October, that will combine ESG's eight financing programmes covering trade, working capital, fixed assets, venture debt, mergers and acquisitions, and project financing.
- The Government will take on up to 70 per cent of the risk for bank loans, up from 50 per cent in most existing schemes, made by firms that have been incorporated for less than five years.
- The extension of the existing SME Working Capital Loan scheme until March 2021.
- Trade associations and chambers will develop five-year

plans to map out how they can help their industries transform. The Government is also working with partners on the secure exchange of electronic trade documents to lift productivity.

Government assistance will also be available in a tiered manner to help firms build deep enterprise capabilities, said Mr Heng. Large firms will get customised support from the Economic Development Board, ESG and other agencies, while SMEs will be supported through "scalable solutions".

These measures come amid an expected moderation of global economic growth this year. Singapore's economy grew by 3.2 per cent in 2018 compared with 3.9 per cent in 2017. "Our efforts to transform our economy are bearing fruit," said Mr Heng, who cited the 23 Industry Transformation Roadmaps that were launched in the 2016 Budget. Productivity has grown by 3.6 per cent a year since 2016, up from 1.6 per cent a year recorded in the preceding three years, he noted.

Part of the productivity boosts arise from the Government's support of SMEs, many of which would otherwise be hard-pressed for resources to beat industrial disruption, said business owners.

"Young companies face a constant challenge of being resource- or capital-constrained, which potentially limits growth and the speed to scale," said e-commerce platform Shopmatic's CEO Anurag Avula, adding that the measures to support SMEs are "very encouraging".

Food manufacturer Golden Bridge had tapped the Lean Enterprise Development Scheme and partnered local institutes to help automate production and raise efficiency.

These have enabled it to be competitive against other manufacturers in Europe, where it is now seeking to expand, said operations director Ong Chew Yong.

While the manufacturing industry has performed strongly, Mr Heng said the construction and some service sectors continue to show weaker productivity growth.

"There is much more we can do, especially in sectors like domestic services. We must press on."

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SMEs to get more help to adopt technology

Irene Tham
Senior Tech Correspondent

As new technologies disrupt their traditional business models, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will see an existing initiative expanded to help them transform digitally and to stay relevant in their business.

Specifically, SMEs can continue to look forward to having up to 70 per cent of the cost of more tools such as cyber security and artificial intelligence subsidised, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

Such help will come under the

SMEs Go Digital programme, announced in 2017.

"We will expand the number and range of cost-effective, pre-approved digital solutions that will be supported under SMEs Go Digital to boost technology adoption among SMEs," he said.

So far, the scheme has helped some 4,000 out of 200,000 SMEs in Singapore in basic automation. The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) has budgeted some \$80 million for potential beneficiaries over four years starting from April 2017.

IMDA will also roll out Industry Digital Plans (IDPs) for the accountancy, sea transport and construc-

tion sectors, where innovation has been lagging.

Specifically, these IDPs will contain a non-intimidating guide to help SMEs in identified sectors assess their digital readiness and explore opportunities to go digital.

Similar IDPs have already been launched for the logistics, retail and wholesale trade sectors.

SMEs Go Digital replaced a more basic seven-year-old iSprint initiative, which provided similar subsidies and basic technology advice benefiting some 8,000 SMEs.

Separately, IMDA will also jointly pilot a cross-border marketplace with the Monetary Authority of Singapore. To be powered by artificial

intelligence, the marketplace aims to help SMEs find global buyers and suppliers.

Known as Business sans Borders, the initiative is at proof-of-concept stage and aims to enhance domestic and international trade opportunities for SMEs.

The Automation Support Package (ASP), announced in Budget 2016, will also be extended by another two years until March 2021.

Under the scheme, more than 300 SMEs have had better access to loans for qualifying projects, with the Government sharing risks with participating financial institutions and jointly providing up to 70 per cent of the cost of technology projects.

Mr Jonathan Ho, head of enterprise market in KPMG, said the moves will build more digital capabilities in companies. But SMEs also need help "to road-map their digital journey".

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Mr Sim Wong Hoo with Creative's Super X-Fi headphones, which have an award-winning technology that recreates a holographic sound experience. Mr Sim was lauded by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat for maintaining his entrepreneurial spirit. ST PHOTO: TREVOR TAN

Creative Technology chief continues to innovate

Sue-Ann Tan

"If you don't innovate, you will be eliminated."

That is the mantra of Mr Sim Wong Hoo, chief executive and chairman of Creative Technology, which has been at the forefront of innovative technology development since its birth in 1981.

To stay competitive, Mr Sim has tried to ensure that his firm is agile and creative. He was lauded by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in his Budget speech yesterday.

"The spirit of entrepreneurship is critical for all these endeavours –

having a vision of the future, and taking practical actions, day in, day out, to explore a range of possibilities and solve a myriad of problems. Mr Sim's story illustrates the point that to succeed, we must learn, we must walk the ground and we must persist," said Mr Heng.

At 64, Mr Sim is still innovating. Creative Technology recently launched the Super X-Fi, a technology that recreates a holographic sound experience with headphones. It won 14 awards at the 2019 Consumer Electronics Show in the United States.

"Innovation is the lifeblood... of any company. But to prosper, you

also need to be lean, agile, highly competitive... and (have) some luck," he told The Straits Times.

Mr Sim added that Singapore firms face a lack of talent in the field of innovation. Small and medium-sized enterprises also face difficulties in attracting talented people, who may prefer to go to multinational companies.

He said: "Singapore companies should be given more space to participate in the local market for them to grow their wings before 'pushing them off the cliff', into the markets overseas."

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MORE ROOM TO GROW, PLEASE

Singapore companies should be given more space to participate in the local market for them to grow their wings before 'pushing them off the cliff', into the markets overseas.



MRSIM WONG HOO, chief executive and chairman of Creative Technology.

BUDGET 2019

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BUDGET
2019

Supporting our workers and firms

With the centre of economic gravity shifting to Asia, we should position Singapore as 'Asia 101' for global MNCs looking to expand into Asia's growing markets, and as 'Global 101' for Asian companies ready to go global... we will continue to build Singapore's position as a Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Commentary

Expansionary Budget, but what about demographic challenge?



Vikram Khanna

Associate Editor

Budgets come in various forms. Some are "Big Bang", full of startling surprises, good and bad. Some are status-quoist, hardly distinguishable from what came in previous years. Others are cumulative, building on the past towards a long-term goal, taking many small steps forward and a few big ones.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat's latest Budget is in the latter category. In what is expected to be a year of slower economic growth, it is appropriately expansionary,

with expenditure projected to rise to \$80.3 billion, 1.6 per cent higher than in FY2018, which was also an expansionary Budget year.

Budget 2019 adds to past initiatives to build enterprise capabilities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – a long-haul exercise. It sets aside \$100 million for the SME co-investment fund, which will catalyse funding for SMEs and help them scale up and expand overseas. It will (from October) consolidate eight existing SME financing schemes into a single one, which will save companies the trouble of having to navigate a financial maze.

To nurture the enterprises of the future, it will expand support for SMEs less than five years old by taking 70 per cent of the risk for bank loans to these companies, compared with 50 per cent at present. It will also expand programmes to help SMEs go digital and automate.

While companies will welcome

all of the above, many will be disappointed to learn that the quotas for foreign workers in the service sector will be tightened gradually over the next two years.

While the effects will be partly offset by transitional funding support for training and development, service-intensive industries such as retail, food and beverage, healthcare and IT could face rising costs over the medium term, and find it harder to expand.

GENEROUS SOCIAL POLICIES

Budget 2019 provides generously for social policies, in keeping with what Mr Heng describes as "our long-term plan to build a caring and inclusive society".

One significant initiative is to increase assistance under the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) scheme, which provides cash payouts and Central Provident Fund top-ups to some 440,000 workers whose earnings are in the bottom 20 per cent. The qualifying

income cap will be raised from \$2,000 to \$2,300 and the maximum payouts will be increased by up to \$400, with older workers getting higher payouts.

Budget 2019 provides a raft of benefits for healthcare, including enhanced subsidies under the Community Health Assist Scheme, which enables lower and middle-income Singaporeans to access primary medical and dental care at clinics near their homes; and more financial support for long-term care.

But the highlight of Budget 2019 is the \$6.1 billion for the Merdeka Generation Package, essentially a healthcare subsidy scheme for citizens born during the 1950s, and who obtained citizenship by 1996.

Mr Heng described this group as "an independent and resilient generation" who played a critical role in Singapore's development, was among the earliest batches to do national service, build the public services, modernise the economy and help forge a harmonious multicultural, multiracial society.

DESERVING BUT DIVERSE

These achievements deserve acknowledgement and gratitude. But, compared with the Pioneer Generation, the Merdeka Generation is better educated, enjoyed more of the best years of Singapore's economic growth as well as increases in asset values,

earned more and saved more. So, it is fitting that it gets a less generous package of benefits than the Pioneer Generation received in Budget 2014.

The Merdeka Generation is also diverse, including business tycoons, well-heeled professionals, middle-class people, as well as blue-collar and low-income workers, some of whom have retired. So, to the question of whether all of them are equally deserving, at least in terms of need, the answer is "no".

Normally, when distributing benefits, the Government follows strict eligibility criteria based on need, as in, for example, the GST Voucher Scheme, the WIS or Silver Support Scheme, all of which are subject to rigorous means testing, and rightly so. But surprisingly, in the case of the Merdeka Generation Package, the benefits are to be distributed regardless of need, with the well-heeled getting the same as low-income retirees. Moreover, most of the benefits are not one-off, but for life.

While still rewarding all of the Merdeka Generation, the package could be made more progressive by giving bigger benefits to its lower and middle-income members than to those more affluent.

Health subsidies now cover just about all of Singapore's elder population. While this is a solid achievement that should do any

government proud, it also entails the risk of overconsumption of healthcare services, signs of which are already evident. With subsidy bills likely to escalate over the coming years, it might in future be prudent to shift some of the burden to the private sector – for example, by giving incentives to companies to provide more generous health benefits to employees.

Another surprise in Budget 2019 is that while it astutely flags the key medium-term challenge of climate change, it contains no measures to address Singapore's demographic challenge, which is at least as urgent. At current birth rates, the citizen workforce is projected to start declining from next year.

In the absence of immigration, and barring a sudden increase in fertility rates (which seems improbable), Singapore would be at risk of moving into an era of chronically low economic growth – unless productivity keeps rising and remains high, which is also improbable.

Thus, while Budget 2019 does an admirable job of building enterprise capabilities and strengthening the pillars of Singapore's now-quite-impressive social security system, there remains much unfinished business to be addressed in future Budgets.

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New centres of innovation for food and energy

Move to position S'pore as Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise

Cheryl Teh

A centre of innovation focusing on food resilience and another on industry-led innovation in the energy sector will be opened here as part of efforts to cement Singapore's position as the Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

He added that the Government will also prepare and develop people here to take advantage of the opportunities.

The Centre of Innovation in Aquaculture at Temasek Polytechnic will bring together high-tech marine farms in Singapore to improve the country's food resilience.

The farms will be able to pool resources, share ideas and use the infrastructure as well as tap expertise provided by government agencies, institutes of higher learning, and public research institutes.

Separately, an energy centre at Nanyang Technological University will work with the Sustainable Energy Association of Singapore to drive industry-led innovation in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy and electric mobility.

Enterprise Singapore said the centre will enable firms to commercialise their cutting-edge innovations by providing the technical know-how to turn energy research into scalable, industry-applicable technology. The centre will also work as an incubator for energy sector start-ups, and link them with private sector-owned test beds to trial their projects.

Mr Heng said these two centres, along with other initiatives announced yesterday, will cement Singapore's position as "Asia 101" for global multinational companies looking to expand into Asia's growing markets, and as "Global 101" for Asian companies ready to go global.

To develop and prepare talent, he said current local and overseas internship programmes will be combined into a single Global Ready Talent Programme with more funding for students at institutes of higher learning who plan

to intern with overseas-based Singapore firms.

The talent programme, which is not just for students, will also send Singaporeans with up to three years of working experience for postings in high-growth Singapore firms in markets such as South-east Asia, China and India.

Singapore will continue to build global partnerships so that local firms and people can forge new areas of collaboration with the international community, he added.

One of the initiatives involves organisers combining two events – the Singapore Week of Innovation and Technology (Switch) and the Singapore FinTech Festival – to draw more entrepreneurs, investors and innovators from around the world. This, he said, will increase partnership opportunities, and allow participants to collaborate in technological innovation in the fourth industrial revolution. The two events will be held in the same week in mid-November.

Mr Heng said the spirit of entrepreneurship is critical for all these endeavours to succeed, adding that it is important to have a vision of the future, and take practical steps to explore a range of possibilities and solve a myriad of problems.

HSBC Singapore chief executive Tony Cripps said the Budget further cements Singapore's Smart Nation ambitions, through its focus on driving better innovation collaboration with universities and the move to lift the skills of its domestic and international talent.

"Encouraging international expertise and also broad-based domestic upskilling programmes shows that the Government is taking a holistic approach to innovation," Mr Cripps added.

He said the continued investment in research and development, as well as the focus on the actual application of technologies already in play, means that the current and future state are being jointly considered. "Our international clients are telling us this is a prerequisite for further investment," he added.

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Ms Bernice Chan, who interned at a farm in China run by Oceanus Group when she was 19, is now a management trainee with the Singapore firm. The 21-year-old is part of the operations team at the Oceanus farm, and her tasks include conducting experiments to learn more about abalones. PHOTO: OCEANUS GROUP

Overseas internship prepared her for job with Singapore firm

Ms Bernice Chan was only 19 when she went to China to intern at a farm run by seafood supply chain manager Oceanus Group.

During her time at the farm in Xiamen, in Fujian province, she did maintenance work, fed abalones

and did preparation work for periods when abalones would spawn.

Now, the 21-year-old is working as a management trainee with the Singapore firm.

Ms Chan is an example of how young Singaporeans should go over-

seas to gain exposure and work experience, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said in his Budget speech yesterday. He announced a programme to enhance funding support for students interning overseas with Singapore firms.

Ms Chan said: "The internship experience was eye-opening for me. It was a lot of fun working with the locals. I learnt a lot, from interpersonal skills to technical skills."

Ms Chan, who chose to study marine science and aquaculture at Re-

public Polytechnic, is now part of the operations team at the Oceanus farm. She helps with data collection and analysis, and conducts experiments to learn more about abalones.

"Overseas internships are important because you are given the opportunity to immerse yourself in a different environment... It is amazing what you gain from five months in different surroundings."

Sue-Ann Tan

St John's sea bass bred in 30% less time, resilient to diseases

Producers of a home-grown breed of fish are looking to take it global. St John's sea bass, developed by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) in collaboration with Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory, was cited by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as an example of how aquaculture is being transformed in Singapore.

The breed is less susceptible to diseases and can be bred in 30 per cent less time. A start-up, Allegro Aqua, was set up when scientists from Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory, working with various farms, demonstrated that they could scale up the production of St John's sea bass and that the fish could have better growth and survival rates.

Dr Jiang Junhui, head of AVA's

Marine Aquaculture Centre, said AVA has been working with Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory on a selective breeding programme for Asian sea bass since 2003. "We contributed our expertise in breeding and brood stock facilities for the project," he added.

St John's sea bass was named after the place where research on it was done – at the Marine Aquaculture Centre on St John's Island.

This research, Allegro Aqua said, is the culmination of more than 15 years of advanced research efforts in genetic selection and mass cross-breeding done through dedicated and careful natural selection.

"Allegro's St John's sea bass is naturally cultured through a selective breeding programme that



St John's sea bass is naturally cultured through a selective breeding programme, said Allegro Aqua CEO Peter Chia. PHOTO: ALLEGRO AQUA

leverages molecular markers to precisely select superior brood stocks with specific desirable traits," added its CEO Peter Chia.

"From there, we can produce elite offspring through natural crossing which have better feed conversion ratio, faster growth qualities and a stouter physical

structure resulting in higher fillet yield," he said. "This is in line with our commitment towards environmental stewardship and responsible farming to deliver safe, healthy and superior quality food fish for today, and our future generations."

Cheryl Teh



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BUDGET
2019

Keeping Singapore safe and secure

The Government will continue to invest a significant share of our resources – about 30 per cent of our total expenditure this year – to support our defence, security and diplomacy efforts. This spending is significant, but indispensable. We will invest more, if the need arises, to protect the sovereignty of Singapore and the well-being of Singaporeans.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Noting that Singapore must continue to innovate and build new capacities to meet security needs, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat also stressed that every Singaporean must play a part in keeping the country safe and secure, through the Total Defence approach. PHOTO: MINDEF



To stay ahead of these threats, Mr Heng said, Singapore must continue to innovate and build new capacities to meet security needs.

In the same vein, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will set up the Home Team Science and Technology Agency by this year to develop capabilities and support the ministry's operational needs.

"These capabilities will strengthen the Home Team's ability to carry out its mission of safeguarding Singapore," said Mr Heng, adding that more details will be given by the Home Affairs Minister.

MHA will also help the private security industry to innovate and use technology to better partner the Home Team, he said.

But every Singaporean needs to play a part too in keeping Singapore safe and secure, through the Total Defence approach, said Mr Heng.

At the national level, Singapore plans for the long term and takes measures such as stockpiling critical supplies, diversifying sources of water and strengthening food security.

Mr Heng's emphasis comes as Singapore and Malaysia are discussing several bilateral issues, which include disputes over maritime borders, airspace management and water prices.

Last December, Malaysia also announced it was considering limiting or stopping egg exports, and restricting exports of certain types of seafood.

Mr Heng added that as a people, Singaporeans must have the "psychological and emotional resilience to face crises stoically". "As threats get more sophisticated, Singaporeans must stay vigilant and guard against non-conventional forces that threaten to divide us."

Touching on the importance of national service and its role in forging a deep understanding that each Singaporean has a duty to defend the nation, he urged families and employers to support national servicemen in every way possible.

Meanwhile, Mr Heng noted that a sixth pillar of digital defence was just incorporated into Singapore's Total Defence framework. "Like other pillars of Total Defence, digital defence involves everyone – individuals, community groups, businesses and the Government," he said.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies research fellow Graham Ong-Webb said the increased focus on defence and security issues, despite the proportion of spending staying roughly the same this year, could be aimed at sending a message to other countries.

"It shows that we mean what we say and are willing to put that into resourcing to bolster diplomatic, defence and security lines to ensure that Singapore is not compromised in any way," he added.

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30% of total expenditure set aside for defence, security, diplomacy

Spending is significant, but indispensable, and more will be invested if need arises: Heng

Tan Tam Mei

About 30 per cent of the Government's total expenditure this year is being set aside to support defence, security and diplomacy efforts – spending that is "significant, but indispensable", said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

And the Government will invest more, if the need arises, to protect Singapore's sovereignty and Singaporeans' well-being, he said.

"Everyone has a role to play to keep Singapore safe and secure. Let us continue to stay united in defending our home and way of life," added Mr Heng.

About \$22.7 billion – or 28.3 per cent of the \$80.3 billion total budgeted expenditure – is set aside for the Defence, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs ministries this year.

The lion's share is for defence expenditure, which is expected to increase by 4.8 per cent to \$15.5 billion. Spending for the other two areas is expected to be steady at \$6.7 billion and \$500 million, respectively.

Last year, about \$21.9 billion – about 27.8 per cent of the \$79 billion revised total expenditure – was allocated to the three ministries.

There was a greater focus on security and external relations issues in this year's Budget than in previous

years, with Mr Heng speaking on these at the start of his speech.

Noting that a safe and secure Singapore "gives us the confidence to chart an independent course", he said the Republic cannot take its peace, prosperity and stability for granted, as it remains vulnerable to regional and global fluctuations.

Also, Singapore cannot waver in its commitment to defence and security – with diplomacy and deterrence as twin pillars of its approach – against an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment.

Even as Singapore builds good relations with other countries through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) lends weight to diplomatic efforts and ensures that negotiations with Singapore are taken seriously, noted Mr Heng.

"Should diplomacy fail, we must

\$22.68b

Budget for the Defence, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs ministries for FY2019.

stand ready to safeguard our interests and defend ourselves," said Mr Heng, adding that Home Team agencies and the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore also ensure a safe and secure environment for all.

The SAF remains a "bulwark" as security threats evolve and become more complex, said Mr Heng.

He also cited how the threat of terrorism remains high, with Singapore continuing to detect individuals here who have been radicalised as it sees a global rise in attacks by radi-

cised individuals and cells.

In addition, the threat of malicious cyber activities is also growing, and connectivity can be exploited to disrupt and divide society through cyber attacks and the spread of falsehoods, Mr Heng said.

"In particular, foreign actors will try to influence our domestic affairs and politics. This is not new, but new technologies have made it easier for others to mount attacks with greater ease and intensity, and with more sophisticated tactics."

Investing more in infrastructure to protect against climate change

Chang Ai-Lien
Science Editor

The Government will be investing in infrastructure in a big way and developing long-term plans to protect the country against climate change, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

But individuals must also change their ways and work towards a more sustainable future.

"As a low-lying island nation, there is nowhere to hide when sea levels rise," he said. "To protect ourselves against climate change and rising sea levels, we will have to invest more. Together with existing infrastructure needs, our total bill for infrastructure will increase significantly," he said.

Mr Heng pointed out that it is very difficult to project spending needs so far ahead, although the different ministries have done some preliminary estimates.

"We will continue to do our best to look forward, develop fiscal plans well in advance, and put in place the right approach to finance such long-lived major infrastructure. Each generation should contribute its fair share," he added.

The Government's Climate Action Plan, launched in 2016, has

seen low-lying roads near coastal areas raised. Changi Airport's Terminal 5 is also being built 5.5m above the mean sea level. And there are pilot projects involving dikes and new reclamation methods on Pulau Tekong to shed light on how to deal with rising sea levels.

Mr Heng said the carbon tax being applied to this year's emissions is an important signal to companies and households to adopt energy-efficient practices.

And the Zero Waste Masterplan, which will be launched in the second half of the year, will look at better management of food waste, e-waste and packaging waste, including plastics, among other issues.

However, individuals must also change their ways, he noted, by adopting the 3Rs: reducing consumption, reusing and recycling.

Building a more sustainable environment also creates opportunities. "Just as we closed the water loop, we can now turn our attention to closing the waste loop," Mr Heng said.

Start-ups are already tackling the challenge: Two companies, Ugly Good and Tria, for instance, have been working on innovative ways to convert food-related waste into useful products, he said.

Praising the National Parks Board for its "excellent job" in greening



Changi Airport's Terminal 5 is being built 5.5m above the mean sea level as part of efforts to deal with rising sea levels. ST FILE PHOTO

the island, he said that the more than 40 per cent green cover here improves both the living environment and air quality.

"Our beautiful living environment can also be enhanced through the smart use of technology as part of our Smart Nation efforts," he added, giving as examples pneumatic waste collection, the use of district cooling in the Marina Bay area and environmentally friendly buildings. "Today, our shining Little Red Dot can hold its own on the global stage," he said.

But the work is not over: Singapore's development plans must be far-sighted and must include the country's need to be well connected within and with the world.

Within Singapore, there are now about 230km of MRT lines, a figure which will rise to about 360km in the 2030s. Airport and sea port capacities are also being enhanced. "This will strengthen our role as a key node within Asia and to the world."

Mr Heng said the long-term transformation of the city must start with Housing Board estates, where most people live.

"Many cities have large tracts that slip into disrepair over time – we must avoid that. We must strive to make every town in Singapore green and liveable by rejuvenating them systematically over time."

The nation's public housing policies have been uniquely successful because of long-term planning, he said.

"Today, we are not just building new flats. We are improving the quality of life for Singaporeans through the rejuvenation of our public housing estates."

Touching on the upcoming URA Master Plan 2019, he said it would guide the country's urban development over a 10- to 15-year time frame, ensuring that the limited land could meet the needs of current and future generations.

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Diesel duty doubled to 20 cents a litre

The excise duty on diesel will be raised from 10 cents to 20 cents a litre with immediate effect.

At the same time, the annual Special Tax for diesel-powered cars and taxis will be reduced further by \$100 and \$850, respectively, from tomorrow. They were reduced by the same quantum two years ago.

With the change, an owner of a Euro 5 1.6-litre diesel car who pays an annual Special Tax of \$540 will now pay \$440 a year. And a fleet owner of a diesel taxi who currently pays \$4,250 a year will now pay \$3,400.

However, these may not fully offset the excise duty at the pumps.

Announcing the move yesterday, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said: "Diesel exhaust is highly pollutive, and adversely affects our people's health and quality of life. Many cities in Europe have announced restrictions on diesel vehicle usage. We have also taken steps to discourage diesel consumption."

Owners of private diesel buses and goods vehicles will be granted new road tax rebates for a three-year period from Aug 1 this year to July 31, 2022.

A 100 per cent road tax rebate will be granted in the first year, followed by 75 per cent in the second year and 50 per cent in the third year.

The new road tax rebate of 100 per cent will apply for the period from Aug 1 this year to July 31, 2020.

Diesel school buses and eligible diesel private-hire or excursion buses that ferry schoolchildren will receive additional cash rebates for the same three-year period.

Over three years, Mr Heng said these buses will receive as much as \$3,200 in cash rebates.

ComfortDelGro Corp, which has one of the largest diesel fleets here, said it will be passing on the entire savings resulting from the reduction in the annual Special Tax for diesel taxis to its drivers. The savings will help offset a foreseeable increase in running cost.

Taxi drivers and private-hire drivers who use diesel vehicles will incur around \$1,000 more a year if their driving patterns do not change.

This is based on an average daily mileage of 300km and a fuel efficiency of 10km a litre.

A private bus operator will incur around \$2,000 more per full-sized bus a year, based on an average mileage of 140km a day and a fuel efficiency of 2.5km a litre.

At 20 cents a litre, the duty on diesel is still less than half that for petrol.

Christopher Tan

BUDGET
2019

Drawing on past for the future

The changing global and domestic landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. We will continue to chart our way forward confidently in the Singapore way, building on our distinct strengths and our Singaporean DNA.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKEAT

Reflecting on past to chart way forward

Lessons learnt from island's history will help S'poreans forge better future together: Heng

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community Correspondent

As Singapore marks its bicentennial year this year, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat urged Singaporeans to reflect on the "twists and turns" in the island's history to chart a path forward for an even better future, and to respond to challenges with grit and determination.

He said the country is today facing four major shifts: The pivot in global economic weight towards Asia; rapid technological advancements; changing demographic patterns; and the decline in support for globalisation, with some countries questioning its value.

On the global stage, trade frictions between the United States and China have developed into a strategic competition of strength and of governance systems, and this has raised geopolitical uncertainty.

Closer to home, he noted that the 10 Asean economies collectively are projected to become the fourth

largest in the world by 2030. However, bilateral issues have surfaced with Malaysia.

He said these need to be resolved based on mutual respect and common interests as well as international laws and norms. He added that Singaporeans must remain united.

On the domestic front, Mr Heng said longer-term challenges need to be addressed, including ageing, social mobility, inequality, economic transformation and climate change.

Mr Heng said the Budget's strategic plan centres on building a strong, united Singapore for the country to continue to progress. It will draw on the country's strengths and the Singaporean DNA – of openness, multiculturalism and self-determination – forged from its roots as an open port.

The Government also picked up on three lessons from the country's history. The first is that as long as the Republic stays relevant and useful, Singapore and Singaporeans will have a place in the world. The country, he said, must develop



An art wall at Royal Plaza on Scotts featuring the island's past, as part of the bicentennial events. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat urged Singaporeans to reflect on the "twists and turns" in the island's history. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

deep capabilities, stay open and connected, and draw ideas and talents from around the globe.

"Singaporean talents have been

making their mark in various fields, and connecting with other highly skilled individuals from around the world will make our team even

stronger," he added.

Mr Heng also noted that external events around Singapore will also shape and reshape lives here. "Our

people have shown time and again that we can take the long view, adapt with the times and thrive," he said.

The third lesson learnt is that Singapore draws its strength from its diversity, "by focusing on what we have in common". He noted that while the country's forefathers clustered around ethnic and religious groups to support one another, this support today is regardless of race, language or religion.

He said that as a city-state, Singapore is nimble and can adapt to changes faster. It can also take advantage of its strategic location and "serve as a neutral, trusted node in key spheres of global activity".

Mr Heng added: "We strive to be a place where people and ideas congregate, at the frontier of global developments. We want to be a Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise."

Mr Heng called on all Singaporeans to partner with the Government and support one another to succeed in this endeavour. "We are using our financial resources to help realise our strategies for a strong, united Singapore. But financial resources alone do not get us there," he said.

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Changi's T5, Cross Island Line to be partly funded through borrowing

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

The cost of huge infrastructure projects such as Changi East, which includes Terminal 5 (T5), and the Cross Island Line will be partly funded through borrowing, as will other infrastructure investments such as those to tackle climate change.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat noted: "For these large and lumpy expenditures where the benefits span many generations of Singaporeans, paying for them through some borrowing is fairer and more efficient."

But the Government will take a different approach to recurrent expenditures in areas like healthcare, pre-school education and security.

Here, spending will be funded by recurrent revenues such as the goods and services tax (GST).

Mr Heng noted that responsible and sustainable borrowing for large infrastructure investments helps instil financial discipline and distributes the share of funding more equitably across current and future generations.

The Government borrowed in the 1980s to build the first MRT lines. Statutory boards and government-owned companies have also financed many major infrastructure projects through borrowing.

Changi's T5 – being built as part of the Changi East development that includes other aviation-related facilities – is slated to open around 2030.

The first stretch of the Cross Island Line will be ready by 2029.

Changi Airport Group will operate T5 and take out loans to fund its share of the cost, Mr Heng said.

The Government, with the President's agreement, will provide a guarantee for the loans to lower financing costs, he added.

Passengers and airlines using Changi Airport have also been paying higher fees since last July to help fund the expansion plans, with the \$34 fee to fly out of Changi raised by \$13.30, and further hikes planned.

The Government is also studying the feasibility of using government debt as part of the financing mix for long-term infrastructure projects, Mr Heng said.

Singapore's ability to plan for the long term is its strategic advantage, but this can be realised only with a sound fiscal plan, he said, adding: "While our nation's needs are growing significantly, we must continue to take a disciplined and prudent approach."

He said recurrent social and security spending are "necessary expenditures – to take care of our elderly, give our children a good start in life, and keep Singapore safe and secure for our families".

Many countries fund these areas through borrowing, but such bor-

rowing shifts the burden of paying for today's needs onto future generations. "That is not the Singapore way," he noted.

Mr Heng said a fairer and more robust approach is to meet recurrent spending with recurrent revenues, which is why Singapore must continually review its tax system to ensure its resilience.

The GST will be raised by two percentage points some time between 2021 and 2025. Mr Heng noted that when this happens, "we will ensure that our overall system of taxes and transfers remains fair and progressive".

The Government will continue to absorb GST on publicly subsidised education and healthcare, provide more help to lower-income households and the elderly, and cushion the impact of the increase for a period through an offset package that will benefit lower- and middle-income households more. Details will come later.

Mr Heng noted that Singapore's main indirect tax, the GST, is not high by international standards, even after it will be raised to 9 per cent. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development average is 19 per cent.

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Smaller tax-free shopping and alcohol allowances

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

Returning travellers have a smaller allowance on tax-exempt overseas shopping, under new rules that kicked in at midnight today.

Those who spend fewer than 48 hours outside Singapore will now avoid paying the 7 per cent goods and services tax (GST) only if the total value of items bought abroad is \$100 or less, down from \$150.

The threshold has also been lowered from \$600 to \$500 for travellers who spend 48 hours or more outside the country, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat announced yesterday. The alcohol duty-free concession will also be reduced, from 3 litres to 2 litres, starting on April 1.

In a joint statement yesterday, the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore and Singapore Customs said the revision of GST import relief limits is aimed at keeping Singapore's tax system resilient, amid rising international travel.

They also reminded travellers to

declare their taxable goods upon arrival in Singapore, and advised them to keep their purchase receipts.

Advance declaration and payment of GST can also be made using the Customs@SG mobile app or Web portal, the statement said.

Failure to declare, or making an incorrect declaration, is an offence that carries a fine of up to \$10,000 or the equivalent of the amount of tax payable – whichever is greater – as well as up to 12 months in prison.

Mr Adrian Ball, EY Asia-Pacific indirect tax leader, said the Budget "continues to look at GST as a key source of revenue for the Government, with a focus on tightening concessions". The smaller GST import relief and alcohol duty-free allowances were "unexpected", and it remains to be seen if more enforcement action will follow, he said.

Housewife Jessie Neo, 44, who shops in Johor Baru, said: "Usually, I spend less than \$100 on groceries, but I have to be more careful now."

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BUDGET 2019

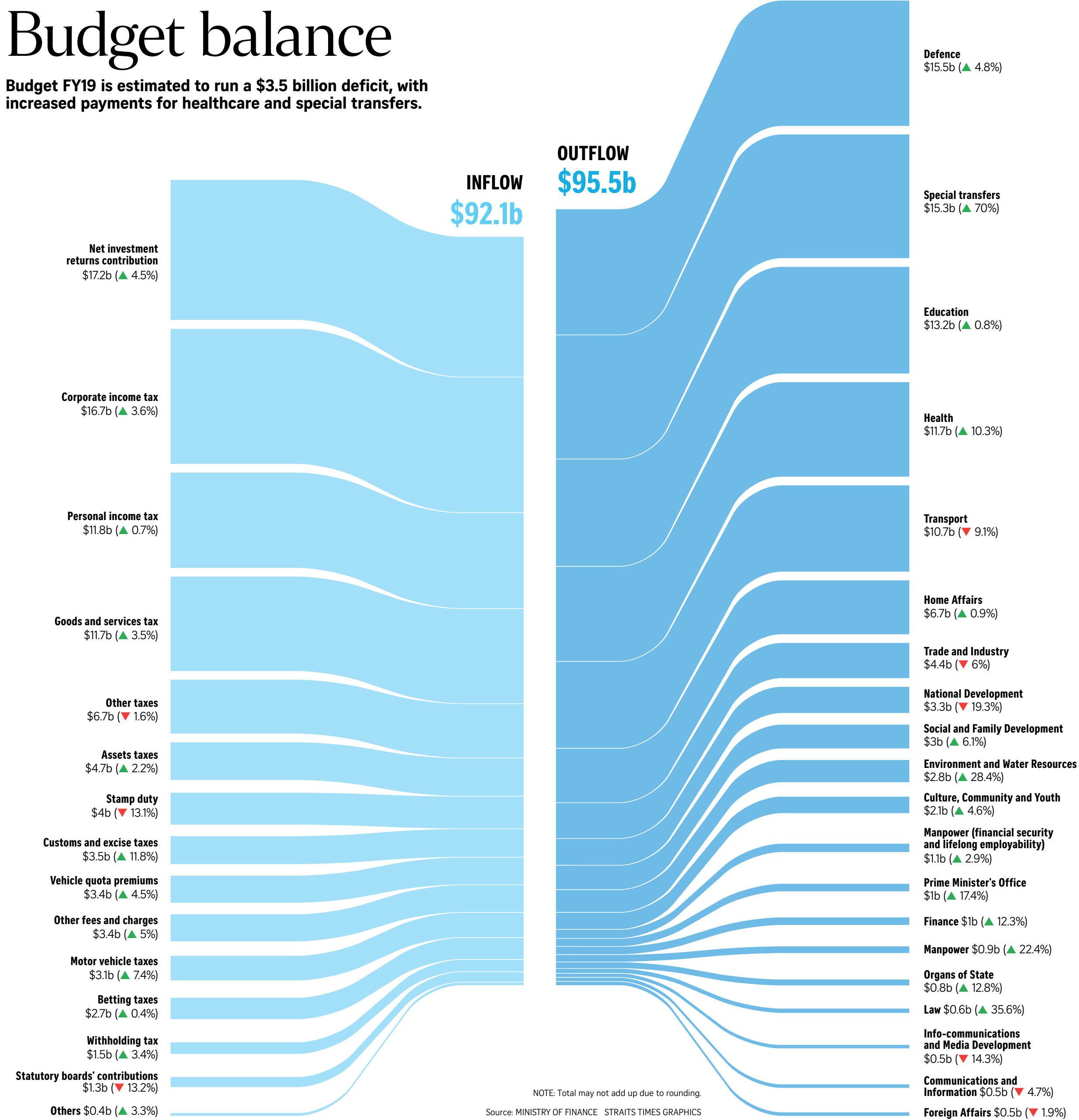
Summing up the numbers

For FY2019, our Budget position remains expansionary, with a basic deficit of \$7.1 billion... On the whole, we expect an overall budget deficit of \$3.5 billion, or 0.7 per cent of GDP. We have sufficient fiscal surplus accumulated over this term of government to fund the overall deficit in FY2019. There is no draw on past reserves.

” FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEKE KEAT

Budget balance

Budget FY19 is estimated to run a \$3.5 billion deficit, with increased payments for healthcare and special transfers.



Overall Budget surplus of \$2.1 billion for FY2018

Figure is \$2.7b rise from earlier forecast; boost from HSR suspension, stamp duty collections

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

An overall Budget surplus of \$2.1 billion is expected for the 2018 financial year, a \$2.7 billion increase from the \$0.6 billion deficit that was forecast a year ago. The fiscal boost was due to the two-year suspension of the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) project and higher-

than-expected stamp duty collections. A \$2.1 billion surplus is equivalent to about 0.4 per cent of Singapore's gross domestic product. It is much lower than the \$10.86 billion achieved in FY2017. If the Government's top-ups to funds and the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC) are excluded, a basic deficit of \$7 billion is expected for 2018. The 2018 Budget was expansionary, Finance Minister Heng Swee

Keat said yesterday. Revenue is expected to come in at \$73.7 billion, a \$1 billion increase over earlier budgeted estimates. This is mainly due to higher collections from statutory boards' contributions, corporate income tax, stamp duties and other taxes, but the increase was partially offset by decreases in vehicle quota premiums, and Customs and excise fees. Owing to lower-than-projected certificate of entitlement (COE) prices and higher disbursements of COE rebates, revenues from vehicle quota premiums are estimated to decrease by \$2.3 billion to \$3.3 billion – a 41.4 per cent fall.

The Government is also setting aside funds to meet long-term needs, including \$6.1 billion for the Merdeka Generation Package and \$5.1 billion for long-term care support. On the whole, an overall deficit of \$3.5 billion is projected for FY2019.

Total expenditure for FY2018 ending March 31, 2019, is revised downwards by \$1 billion to \$79 billion. This exceeds the actual expenditure the year before by \$5.4 billion, owing to more being spent in defence, home affairs, transport plus trade and industry, among others. While operating expenditure was revised upwards by \$1 billion, development spending is expected to be lower – by \$2 billion – against an earlier estimated sum. The main reason is the HSR project suspension and rescheduling of works for some public housing projects. Partially offsetting it are the higher requirements for the

Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2015 Plan, and the Economic Development Assistance Scheme. The NIRC is projected to be \$16.4 billion. The latest 2019 Budget remains expansionary, with the basic deficit forecast to reach \$7.1 billion. Ministries' total expenditures are projected to be \$80.3 billion, 1.6 per cent up on 2018. Higher spending in healthcare, defence, and the environment and water resources will be offset by lower transport expenditure, owing to factors including the HSR project suspension. The Government is also setting aside funds to meet long-term needs, including \$6.1 billion for the Merdeka Generation Package and \$5.1 billion for long-term care support. On the whole, an overall deficit of \$3.5 billion is projected for FY2019. "We have sufficient fiscal surplus accumulated over this term of government to fund the overall deficit in 2019. There is no draw on past reserves," Mr Heng noted.

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BUDGET
2019

Responding to the Budget

Budget 2019 lays out this Government's approach to building a strong, united Singapore. We nurture our young, take care of our seniors, expand opportunities for our people to be at their best, and to live in a liveable, endearing home, secure and globally connected. Together, we can, and will, continue to take Singapore forward.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEE KEAT

Budget gets thumbs-up from older folk and young people



Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat presenting the Budget in Parliament yesterday, where he announced a carbon tax on this year's emissions and the Zero Waste Masterplan, which will focus on waste management and other issues. Young people The Straits Times spoke to welcomed the Government's move to invest in long-term plans to protect Singapore from the effects of global warming. PHOTO: GOV.SG

Support for needy and Merdeka Generation, and plans to tackle climate change welcomed

Rei Kurohi
and Fabian Koh

As part of the \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus announced by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday, 1.4 million lower-income Singaporeans will receive up to \$300 in GST Voucher cash payouts.

This is "very significant", said the National Council of Social Service president Anita Fam, who added that she was "heartened by the generosity" of the Budget.

Mr Heng also announced a \$200 million Bicentennial Community Fund, which will match donations

to Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) dollar for dollar.

Ms Fam, a former lawyer, said she hopes this will spur Singaporeans to donate more.

"I am really hopeful that the dollar-for-dollar matching for donations to IPCs will incentivise giving, especially to social service agencies which are doing good but are finding resourcing a challenge."

In his speech, Mr Heng also outlined some of the benefits to those in the Merdeka Generation, including a one-off \$100 top-up to their PAssion Silver cards and an annual \$200 Medisave top-up until 2023. Singaporeans born between Jan 1,

1950 and Dec 31, 1959 will also get additional subsidies for outpatient care and additional MediShield Life premium subsidies.

Retiree Karin Tan, who worked in sales in the industrial sector, is "very happy" with the package.

"I am currently already retired, and do not draw any income. This will help subsidise my medical costs," said Ms Tan, 64, who has high blood pressure and goes to the polyclinic every four months.

Mr Ameer Ali Abdeali, 68, head of a safety consultancy company, said that while the material benefits of the Merdeka Generation Package are attractive, it is the intangible aspect that is more important to him.

"I appreciate the recognition and validation that members of my generation are being given for our contributions to the country," he said.

Mr Ameer Ali, who has seven grand-nieces and grand-nephews, also praised the boosts that school-going children will receive.

There will be one-off top-ups of \$150 for the Edusave accounts of Singaporean students aged seven to 16, and \$500 for the Post Sec-

ondary Education accounts (PSEA) of students aged 17 to 20. The PSEA funds can be used to pay for fees in local polytechnics and universities, and also for skills-related upgrading courses.

Young people The Straits Times spoke to welcomed the announcement that the Government will invest in long-term plans to protect Singapore from the effects of global warming.

Mr Heng announced a carbon tax on this year's emissions and the Zero Waste Masterplan, to be launched in the second half of the year, which will focus on waste management and other issues.

But individuals must also change their way of life and adopt the 3Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle, he said.

Undergraduate Arjun Dhar agreed. "We are a city with the highest greenery density in the world, in which others live in the middle of our central business district," said the 22-year-old, who is studying law.

"As we reflect on the Bicentennial, Singapore should also look to inculcate in all individuals a sense of care for the planet that nurtures us. This means replacing the idea that we are too small to make a difference with the idea that we each have a responsibility to try."

Miss Pamela Low, 24, a member of the Singapore Youth for Climate Action, said: "The Government eagerly investing in infrastructure to mitigate rising tides and sharing about it at the Budget shows the urgency of addressing the impact of climate change on the national agenda as it would become costlier in the future."

But she added that Singapore cannot simply rely on individuals to take voluntary actions, and that better policies are needed to help them understand the true costs of their actions on the environment.

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Focus on boosting digital skills, reskilling workforce welcomed

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

The 2019 Budget is focused on accelerating the development of digital skills and adoption of innovative solutions, strengthening cyber security and reskilling the workforce in the face of slowing global growth and technological disruptions, business leaders say.

Mr Christian de Guzman, vice-president - senior credit officer of Moody's Investors Service, said: "Against the backdrop of a deteriorating external environment, the mildly expansionary Budget... provides some support to growth, with room for manoeuvre in the event of a prolonged slowdown."

"The restated commitment to avoid borrowing and to use revenue enhancements, such as higher GST (goods and services tax) rates, to finance these larger long-term spending commitments help to preserve Singapore's structurally robust fiscal position."

The focus on building deep enterprise and worker capability should help sharpen Singapore's global competitive edge amid rising protectionism.

Nanyang Technological University's Professor Tan Yong Kam said: "Asean will become the fourth-largest economy in the world by 2030. And Indonesia has become a more important external engine of growth for Singapore. We can position ourselves to soar with the rising regional wind."

Precursor Group managing director Tan Khoo Guan pointed out that by moving away from providing short-term benefits such as tax or cash rebates, Budget 2019's focus is on ensuring that businesses and employees stay relevant.

The introduction of customised support programmes such as Scale-up SG, and Innovation Agents, a two-year pilot to help firms tap industry professionals for opportunities to innovate and commercialise technology, could help local firms deepen their capabilities and internationalise. This, in turn, will generate good jobs and wage growth for local workers, the Singapore Business Federation said.

Singapore FinTech Association president Chia Hock Lai said: "Scale-up SG will increase the chance of producing Singapore-based tech unicorns, while Innovation Agents will increase the chances of success for

Precursor Group managing director Tan Khoo Guan pointed out that by moving away from providing short-term benefits such as tax or cash rebates, Budget 2019's focus is on ensuring that businesses and employees stay relevant.

tech start-ups."

In addition, local enterprises can also look forward to easier access to financing. Precursor's Mr Tan said the setting up of the SME Co-Investment Fund III will make more funds available, the SME Working Capital Loan scheme is being extended, while the introduction of the Enterprise Financing Scheme will streamline existing small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) financing initiatives.

Expanding the coverage of SMEs Go Digital will boost technology adoption by SMEs, while extending the Enterprise Development Grant and enhancing the Productivity Solutions Grant will promote innovation.

Corporate tax director Irene Tai of PwC Singapore said: "The streamlining of financing schemes... should also allow Enterprise Singapore to channel the funds to where they are most needed."

KPMG head of enterprise market Jonathan Ho noted that the Government is "taking up to 70 per cent risk on bank loans to companies less than five years old, and the extension of the SME Working Capital Loan scheme will help catalyse start-ups with innovative ideas".

Mr Daryl Pereira, KPMG's head of cyber security, management consulting, said government support could also have been extended to help businesses address cyber-threats through tax incentives or grants to adopt stronger cyber-security practices.

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How will Budget 2019 help to shape a fiscally sustainable and secure future for Singapore? What is the impact of the Budget measures on companies and how can you best position your business for growth in light of the new proposals?

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- ▶ Economic analysis of the Budget by guest speaker Dr. Tan Khoo Guan
- ▶ Update on recent GST developments
- ▶ Riding the technology wave through a tax lens
- ▶ Key transfer pricing developments in Asia-Pacific

Speakers

Partners and Directors from EY Tax services in Singapore

Guest speaker

- Dr. Tan Khoo Guan**
- ▶ Co-Director, Asia Competitiveness Institute & Associate Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
 - ▶ Chairman, Singapore National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation

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10 must-reads for today

1 3 militants killed in India

Indian security forces yesterday killed three militants, including the suspected organiser of a deadly suicide bombing in the disputed region of Kashmir that has fuelled tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. Four Indian soldiers and a policeman were also killed in yesterday's clash. **WORLD A21**



Protesters clashing with Indian policemen on Sunday, the third day of a curfew imposed in parts of Jammu city after a terror attack last Thursday. PHOTO: DPA

2 A Budget for all

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat unveiled a Budget that will help Singaporeans with healthcare costs, give support for businesses and workers to thrive and benefit nearly 500,000 Singaporeans with the Merdeka Generation Package. He also announced a \$200 million community fund to match charity donations. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

3 Ex-Umno recruits strain PH

Tensions are rising in the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad continues to welcome opposition members to his camp. Although his acceptance of the Umno defectors has ruffled feathers, Tun Dr Mahathir has said he will not hesitate to abandon his PH partners if "they are not loyal to the country". **WORLD A22**

4 S. China integration timeline

The Chinese authorities have unveiled the timeline to further integrate Hong Kong and Macau into the mainland under the ambitious Greater Bay Area plan to create a cluster of world-class cities in southern China. Under the plan, 11 cities are expected to boost collaboration in areas such as science and technology by 2022. **WORLD A23**

5 Women's quest for equality

Singapore women have done well in achieving parity with men, but in other parts of the world the struggle continues, says Professor Tommy Koh. **OPINION A25**

6 Help at night for caregivers

An initiative that will see seniors with dementia taking part in cognitive activities at night to help manage their behavioural and sleep issues will be a big help for caregivers such as retiree Margaret Yeo. The programme will give her some respite from caring for her 92-year-old mother, who suffers from dementia. **HOME B2**

7 Attire check sparks debate

Should the rule against coloured undergarments in schools be relooked? An incident involving a female teacher unbuttoning students' uniforms to check their bra straps has raised questions about schools' guidelines on proper attire. **HOME B5**

8 Luxury homes retain appeal

That foreign buyers, who for years helped drive demand for luxury homes, cannot buy Good Class Bungalows here has not dented their appeal with Singaporeans. The scarcity and exclusivity they confer have pushed prices of these homes to record highs, even as the broader property market cools. **BUSINESS C1**

9 More doubts for key fight

Singaporean Muhammad Ridhwan's World Boxing Council silver featherweight title bout, already pushed back indefinitely from March 29, may be at further risk. This comes after Scott O'Farrell (right), chief executive officer of fight promoter Ringstar, said he could resign over "numerous death threats" from a Russian man he identified only as "Sasha". **SPORT C12**

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VIDEO

On patrol with TransCom

We follow and talk to a team of officers from the Public Transport Security Command, or TransCom. The unit, comprising 500 full-time national servicemen and more than 100 regular officers, turns 10 this year. <http://str.sg/secure>



WEB SPECIAL

About Hyflux's CEO

Hyflux, which once rode wave after wave of success, is now struggling not to drown. Here's more about Ms Olivia Lum, the chief executive and founder of the beleaguered water treatment firm. <http://str.sg/hyflux>

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No change to CPF payout age: Josephine Teo

Manpower Minister says CPF Board will focus on better communicating longstanding policy to members

Lorna Tan
Senior Correspondent

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo explained yesterday in Parliament why she is wary of making a sudden change in the policy on the age that Central Provident Fund (CPF) members can automatically receive monthly payouts from their retirement account.

This is partly because members have been told for years that they can activate the payouts any time from 65 and payouts start when they instruct the CPF.

“So, this has been the longstanding instruction,” she said.

“Every time there is a change, it takes a long while for people to get used to it.”

She suggested focusing on improving communication for the policy as it stands instead.

“If we keep to this consistent line, there is less risk of further confusing,” she added in her reply to Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten) and Mr Png Eng Huat (Hougang).

Mr Lim had expressed concern that the number of members who did not activate their payouts by 70 is not small, and asked if the payouts could start automatically at 65. Mrs Teo replied that she had given serious thought to it but said, among other things, that the CPF Board cannot do this and deprive members of the benefits of keeping their money in the CPF.

She conceded that the CPF Board could do a better job of keeping members up to speed on policy issues. “There is much room for improvement in the way (the board) communicates key issues like starting payouts.”

She was referring to the recent confusion among some CPF members over the age at which they can

start receiving monthly payouts.

Social media posts of a CPF letter that advised the recipient about his payout options on turning 65 led some people to mistakenly conclude the payout age had been raised to 70.

Others thought that if they did not apply to start receiving payouts at age 65, the next time they could do so would be at 70 years old.

It led to at least nine MPs asking for, among other things, to allow members to automatically receive their payouts at age 65.

Mrs Teo, in her reply, stressed that there will be no change in the policy: CPF members can continue to choose to start monthly payouts at 65, or defer them to any time between 65 and 70.

She assured the House that the CPF Board will take steps to improve communication, including reviewing letters sent to those nearing their payout eligibility age, to prevent the kind of misunderstanding that sparked the recent confusion.

She also said that from this year, all members reaching their eligibility payout age can attend a CPF Retirement Planning Service, a face-to-face personal service.

In her reply to Mr Liang Eng Hwa (Holland-Bukit Timah GRC), she encouraged members to visit CPF service centres across the island to get customised guidance.

Her ministry, which oversees the CPF Board, will also work with other agencies such as the Social Service Offices and Silver Generation Office.

Mrs Teo said there was no advantage for the CPF Board or the Government to want members to defer payouts beyond 65. In fact, members enjoy “tangible benefits” when payouts start later, like higher interest.

She noted that for each year payouts are deferred, a member’s CPF savings will earn risk-free interest

CPF members can start retirement payouts any time from age 65

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said in Parliament yesterday that there is no change in policy and Central Provident Fund (CPF) members can choose to start their monthly payouts at 65. They can also defer payouts anytime between 65 and 70, with age 70 being the latest that they can defer payouts. Below are five things members need to know about the issue.



Question 1: DID THE GOVERNMENT CHANGE WHEN I CAN START MY PAYOUTS?

No, there is no change. You can activate your payouts any time from your payout eligibility age, which is 65 from 2018.



Question 2: WHY DON'T PAYOUTS START AUTOMATICALLY AT AGE 65?

The CPF Board starts your payouts after it receives your instructions. This applies to CPF members on the Retirement Sum Scheme (RSS) and those who joined CPF Life from July 2015. It is not assumed that every member wants to start his payouts at 65 as there are benefits to deferring payouts.*



Question 3: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DEFERRING MY PAYOUTS?

You’ll earn more interest, which means longer and/or higher payouts. With every year of deferral, your CPF savings will earn risk-free interest of up to 6 per cent a year.

This 6 per cent includes:

- An extra interest of 1 per cent for the first \$60,000
- Additional extra interest of 1 per cent for the first \$30,000

For members on CPF Life, every year of deferral results in up to 7 per cent higher payouts. If you defer for five years, that’s up to 35 per cent more.



Question 4: WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PAYOUTS AT AGE 70?

In the past, RSS members who did not instruct the CPF Board to start their payouts could end up keeping their savings in their CPF accounts until they passed away.

Therefore a Latest Payout Start Age of 70 was introduced. Even if a member does not give instructions to start his payouts, the CPF Board will start his payouts automatically at age 70.

The member can still instruct the CPF Board to start the payouts any time from age 65. The same applies to members who join CPF Life from July 2015.



Question 5: HOW CAN I START MY PAYOUTS?

Before your payout eligibility age, the CPF Board will send you a personalised letter to inform that you can start your payouts. You can start your payouts by:

- Completing the hardcopy application form that comes with the letter;
- Applying online through the CPF website; OR
- Visiting one of five CPF Service Centres islandwide.

If you do not start your payouts, the CPF Board will continue to send you instructions in your Yearly Statement of Account on how you can do so.

NOTE: *The option to defer CPF Life retirement payouts was not available before July 2015. The payouts for a member who joined CPF Life before July 2015 will therefore automatically start when the member reaches payout eligibility age. This will not change unless the member instructs the CPF Board to defer payouts.

Sources: CPF BOARD, MINISTRY OF MANPOWER STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Mrs Teo noted that for each year payouts are deferred, a member’s CPF savings will earn risk-free interest of up to 6 per cent, well above market rates.

So, members tend to defer their payouts, especially if they have other savings to draw on that are earning low interest or if they are still working.

of up to 6 per cent, well above market rates.

So, members tend to defer their payouts, especially if they have other savings to draw on that are earning low interest or if they are still working.

Mrs Teo said that in the past, some Retirement Sum Scheme (RSS) members had their savings in their CPF accounts until they died, which “is unsatisfactory”.

That led to a new rule last year stipulating that payouts cannot be deferred past 70, for members turning 70 from 2018.

The minister said that about 60

per cent of RSS members who reached their eligibility age in 2017 did not activate their payouts. Even when they reached 70, about half did not ask to start their payouts.

Mrs Teo said some of them may be keeping their savings in the CPF because they have no need for the money or want to earn higher interest. Others, however, may not know that they can start their payouts earlier and so did not instruct the CPF Board.

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SEE PARLIAMENT B4

Footballer Davis fails to report for NS

Sazali Abdul Aziz

Footballer Ben Davis has defaulted on his national service commitments, the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) said in a statement yesterday.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, Mindef said: “Mr Benjamin Davis is an NS defaulter. He failed to report for NS as required. He is also staying overseas without a valid exit permit.

“Mr Davis has committed offences under the Enlistment Act, and is liable upon conviction to a fine of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment of up to three years.”

ST understands that Davis was required to enlist last Thursday.

His father Harvey Davis did not reply when asked to respond to the Mindef statement.

However, the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) expressed its dismay at the news and issued a strongly worded admonition of the player, whom it capped at the Under-19 level. Davis was also called up to the senior national team last year but was not fielded.

A spokesman said: “The FAS is extremely disappointed with Mr Benjamin Davis’ default of his NS obligations. It is thoroughly irresponsible on the part of Mr Davis, and also renege on his (and his father’s) assurance to the FAS that Mr Davis would discharge his NS commitments and play for the Singapore national team.”

The spokesman added that the association had supported Davis’ application to defer his NS, on the basis that he had agreed to play for the national team, and had benefited from the resources used to educate and train him. “While the matter will now be dealt with by Mindef, the FAS wishes to state categorically that we do not condone such



Mindef said footballer Ben Davis failed to report for NS as required and is also staying overseas without a valid exit permit. The 18-year-old signed professional terms with English Premier League club Fulham last July. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

conduct nor did it ever arise in our discussions with Mr Davis that he would seek to avoid his liability,” said the spokesman.

A former student at the Singapore Sports School, Davis, 18, moved to London in 2016 to join English Premier League (EPL) club Fulham’s academy, where he is registered as an English national.

He was born in Thailand to an English father and a Thai mother.

The Phuket-born player signed professional terms with Fulham last July, becoming the first Singaporean footballer to do so with a

top-tier English club.

After he signed, Mindef confirmed that his application for NS deferment had been rejected as he did not “meet the criteria for long-term deferment from full-time NS”.

The decision sparked a debate among the sporting fraternity and the general public about issues such as maximising sporting talent and the need to maintain Singapore’s security.

In August last year, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen laid out the reasons for the rejection in Parliament, highlighting that “there was no

commitment to serve Singapore and our national interests” despite Mr Harvey Davis’ contention that if his son were to become the first Singaporean to play in the EPL, it would “make Singapore proud”.

Dr Ng reiterated that “deferment... cannot be for that individual, no matter how talented, to pursue his own interests or career, even if it vicariously brings credit or fame to Singapore”.

He also noted that Mr Harvey Davis had “consistently refused” to pin down a date for his son to return to serve NS. Mindef has also noted

that there are programmes in place to help national athletes continue training while serving NS.

In the last 15 years, only three athletes – swimmers Joseph Schooling and Quah Zheng Wen, and sailor Maximillian Soh – have been granted long-term deferment.

Schooling and Quah have represented the Republic at various Olympics, with the former making history by winning gold in the 100m butterfly at the 2016 Rio Games.

Davis enjoyed a strong start in his first season with the Fulham Under-18 team – he scored once in 10 games, making 13 tackles and 16 interceptions while racking up a pass accuracy of 90 per cent – but ST understands he has found the going tougher in his sophomore season.

A source, who did not want to be named, said that Davis’ performance was adversely affected after news emerged that his application for NS deferment had been rejected.

While he started 12 of Fulham Under-18s’ first 14 matches of the season, he has played only 136 out of a possible 630 minutes in their last seven games. He also earned the call-up to the Under-21 team for four games, but was an unused substitute on each of those occasions.

Fulham did not reply to ST’s queries by press time.

Previous judgments on NS defaulters have seen Mindef press for a short jail sentence in cases where the default period exceeds two years but the defaulter is young enough to serve his NS duties in full.

A longer jail sentence is pressed for where the defaulter has reached an age at which he cannot serve his full-time NS in a combat vocation or fulfil his NS in full, while the maximum sentence is pressed for where the defaulter is over the age of 40 and cannot be called up for NS at all.

NS defaulters who are under the age of 40 are still required to serve if they return.

A defaulter’s sentence may be discounted based on various factors, such as the length of period of default, how substantial his connection to Singapore is, whether he voluntarily surrendered or was arrested, and whether he pleaded guilty or claimed trial.

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WORLD



MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN
SAUDI CROWN PRINCE STARTS
ASIA TRIP WITH \$27B
PLEDGE FOR PAKISTAN **A23**



Australia's Parliament in session. Canberra this month reported a "security incident on the parliamentary computing network", leading to Cabinet members changing their passwords and taking other security measures. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Australia says 'state actor' hacked parties, Parliament

China says speculation it was behind hacking is irresponsible and a bid to smear country

SYDNEY • Australia yesterday said a "sophisticated state actor" had hacked the country's main political parties and Parliament, just weeks before a closely fought election.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told lawmakers that investigators looking into a hack of Parliament computer systems revealed two weeks ago "also became aware that the networks of some political parties" had been breached.

"Our cyber experts believe a sophisticated state actor is responsible for this malicious activity."

Australian security agencies said they did not know who was behind the attack or their motives.

It is not yet clear what, if any, material was stolen, how long the perpetrators went undetected, or whether the hack could open some political figures up for blackmail.

Earlier this month, Australia reported a "security incident on the parliamentary computing network".

That forced users – including the prime minister and the Cabinet – to change passwords and take other security measures.

Experts warn that attribution is time-consuming and difficult.

"I think it's definitely too early to say," said Mr Fergus Hanson, a cyber-security expert at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, adding that there are only "one or two actors" capable of carrying out such an attack.

Mr Hanson said he would put China "at the top" of the list of possible suspects, but "wouldn't rule out" Russia's involvement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said such speculation about Beijing was "irresponsible" and an attempt to "smear" the country.

"When investigating network breaches, there should be sufficient

evidence, unreasonable guesses can't be made," Mr Geng said at a regular press briefing in Beijing.

He urged the media to "stop using so-called cyber leaks and hacking attacks to discredit China and stop compromising China's interests and China's bilateral relations with the countries concerned".

Beijing and Canberra have sparred over access to natural resources, maritime claims and the use of Chinese state-backed technology companies.

Bilateral relations have recently been frayed over Australia's decision to ban Huawei from the country's 5G network amid national security concerns and the expulsion of Mr Huang Xian, a connected bil-

lionaire who doled out millions in Australian political donations.

Australians are expected to go to the polls mid-May, raising the spectre that hackers could be trying to influence the outcome of the vote, or change the tenor of the debate.

Both Russia and China have used cyber operations in a bid to influence democratic votes.

Beijing's spies have been accused of targeting Taiwanese officials before the election there last year.

Dozens of Russians have been indicted for trying to tilt the 2016 US presidential election, and alleged Russian involvement in Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union in the same year has been documented. Moscow has denied the accusations.

As part of the Five Eyes intelligence network – which also includes Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States – Australia is a particularly rich target for foreign interests. Australia also has access to intelligence to back up any suspicions of state hacking.

"Our political institutions represent high-value targets. But we have resilient systems in place to detect compromises and remediate

RESILIENT SYSTEMS

Our political institutions represent high-value targets. But we have resilient systems in place to detect compromises and remediate them.



MR ALASTAIR MACGIBBON, head of the Australian Cyber Security Centre.

them," said Mr Alastair MacGibbon, head of the Australian Cyber Security Centre. He said his organisation has already briefed electoral commissions across the country and could be deployed to provide technical support to those affected.

Mr Morrison insisted, however, that "there is no evidence of any electoral interference".

"We have put in place a number of measures to ensure the integrity of our electoral system."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Revival of bitter migrant debate a poll boost for Aussie PM

A poll shows the ruling coalition trailing the opposition Labor Party by just 49 per cent to 51 per cent – its strongest result since Mr Scott Morrison became Prime Minister. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



Jonathan Pearlman
For The Straits Times
In Sydney

Since taking over as Australia's Prime Minister last year, Mr Scott Morrison and his ruling coalition have consistently lagged in opinion surveys, and a loss at the upcoming general election seemed inevitable.

But his prospects suddenly looked brighter yesterday, as a poll by market research firm Ipsos shows the Liberal-National coalition trailing the opposition Labor by just 49 per cent to 51 per cent – its strongest result since Mr Morrison replaced Mr Malcolm Turnbull as leader last August. When the survey was last done, in December, Labor was ahead by 54 per cent, to 46 per cent.

The reason for Mr Morrison's bounce seemed clear: The survey was conducted after the coalition launched a dramatic scare campaign on border protection, claiming that the Labor Party was soft on

border security and would spark a wave of migrants seeking to travel to Australia by boat, setting out mainly from Indonesia.

The campaign came amid a fresh debate about border protection, an issue that tends to politically favour the coalition.

Last week, Mr Morrison seized on an opportunity to attack Labor after its leader Bill Shorten backed a measure to allow for the medical evacuation to Australia of asylum seekers held on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Australia turns back asylum seeker boats, where it is safe to do so, and otherwise transfers any migrants who are stopped at sea to the two islands, under a harsh policy that Mr Morrison, as immigration minister from 2013 to 2014, helped to introduce.

Labor's support for the medical evacuations, which was also backed by several independent MPs, led to an embarrassing defeat for Mr Morrison in a vote in the House of Representatives. This was the first time a

sitting government lost a vote in the chamber in almost 80 years.

But Mr Morrison quickly turned this to his advantage, claiming the measure would prompt people smugglers to resume efforts to bring asylum seekers to Australia.

"They say they'll still turn boats back," Mr Morrison told 2GB Radio yesterday. "Really?... They've got no idea what's involved."

Mr Shorten, however, insisted that he remained committed to Australia's strong border policies, accusing Mr Morrison of resorting to "slogans and fear".

The latest debate is likely to prove politically favourable to the coalition, which has benefited at previous elections where refugee arrivals had been an issue.

Not surprisingly, the coalition is doing all it can to raise fears of a sudden new influx of asylum seekers, even claiming that the medical evacuation measure will lead to criminals such as rapists being brought to Australia. In reality, the measure

allows the immigration minister to veto treatment for serious criminals or those who pose a security threat to the country.

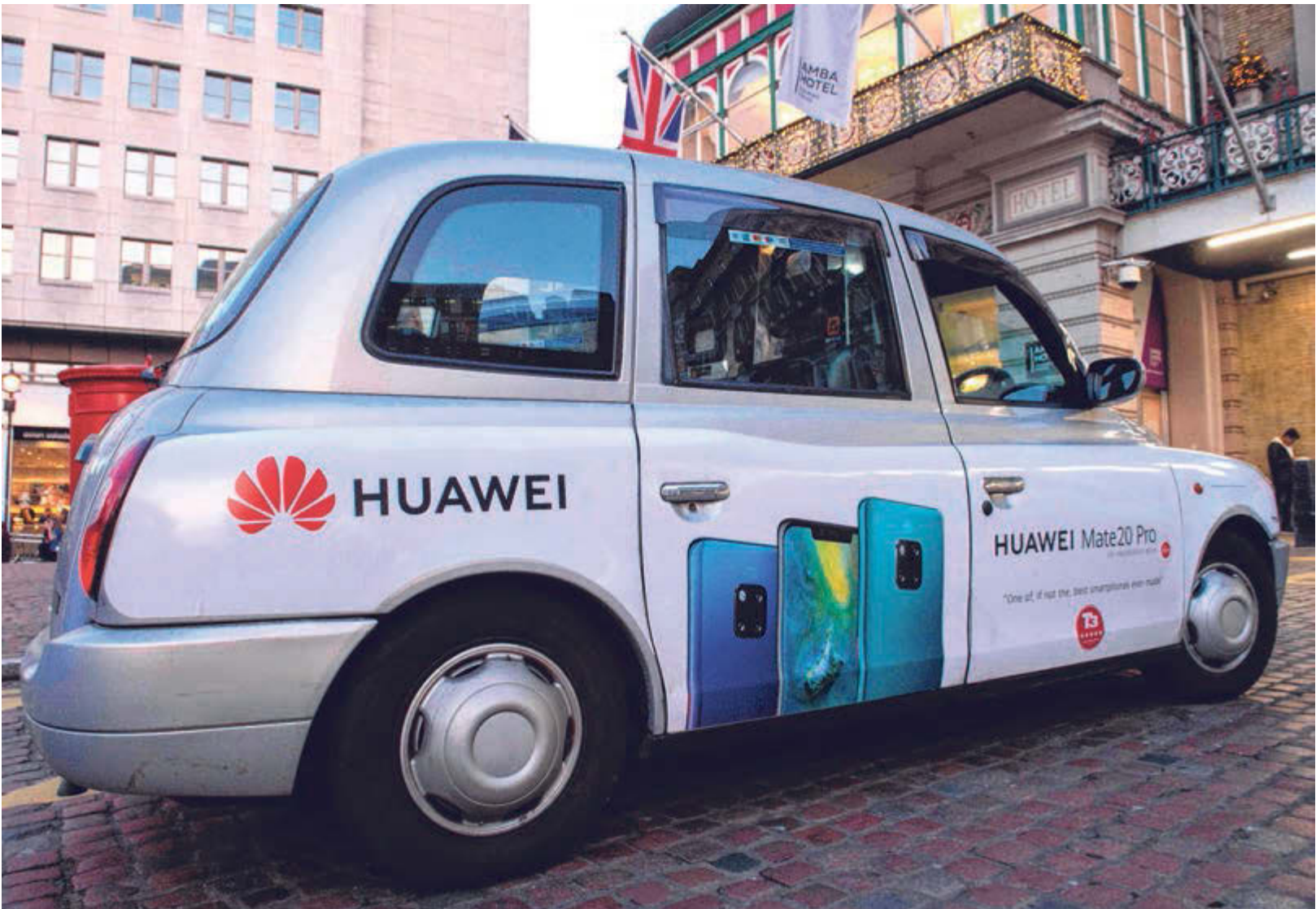
But the coalition's tactic appears to be working.

Analysts said the survey yesterday would give a much-needed confidence boost to the coalition, which has been demoralised by the consistent run of dismal results in opinion polls ahead of the next election, due to be held in May.

"The poll results certainly ensure the coalition will be even more determined to maintain its vehement attack on Labor over boat people," wrote political commentator Jennifer Hewett in The Australian Financial Review.

Any boatload of asylum seekers that arrives in Australia ahead of the next election – regardless of their reasons for fleeing – will provide useful political ammunition for the coalition.

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A Huawei advertisement on a London taxi. Huawei, the world's biggest producer of telecoms equipment, faces scrutiny in the West over its ties with the Chinese government and allegations of enabling state espionage, with the US calling for its allies not to use the firm's technology. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Britain 'against' full ban on Huawei despite US urging

Officials believe risks posed by using China telecoms firm's equipment can be managed

LONDON • British security officials do not support a full ban of Huawei from national telecoms networks despite American allegations that the Chinese firm and its products could be used by Beijing for spying,

according to people with knowledge of the matter. Huawei, the world's biggest producer of telecoms equipment, faces intense scrutiny in the West over its ties with the Chinese gov-

ernment and allegations of enabling state espionage, with the United States calling for its allies not to use the firm's technology.

Although no evidence has been produced publicly and Huawei has denied the claims, the allegations have led several Western countries to restrict its access to their markets.

"We don't favour a complete ban.

It's not that simple," one of the sources told Reuters yesterday, after a Financial Times report on Sunday said that Britain had decided it could mitigate the risks of using Huawei equipment in 5G networks.

The FT cited two sources familiar with what it said was a conclusion by the British National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), which last year

said technical and supply-chain issues with Huawei's equipment had exposed national telecoms networks to new security risks.

Any decision to allow Huawei to participate in building next-generation 5G networks would be closely watched by other nations, because of Britain's membership of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing group with the US.

Fellow Five Eyes member Australia has banned Huawei from supplying 5G equipment, while New Zealand yesterday said it would make its own independent assessment of the risk.

Britain is an important market for Huawei and last month Vodafone, the world's second-largest mobile operator, said it was "pausing" the deployment of its equipment in core networks until Western governments give the Chinese firm full security clearance.

Other operators in Europe, including Britain's BT and France's Orange, have already removed Huawei's equipment or taken steps to limit its future use.

Two sources said the NCSC did not think it was necessary to completely bar Huawei from British networks, believing it could continue to manage any risks by testing the products at a special laboratory overseen by intelligence officials.

Both sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the position was consistent with public statements made by the NCSC and British officials.

"As was made clear in July's HC-SEC oversight board, the NCSC has concerns around Huawei's engineering and security capabilities. We have set out the improvements we expect the company to make, an NCSC spokesman said, referring to Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre.

People with knowledge of the matter said the next NCSC report on Huawei's position in Britain will criticise its slow response to issues raised in last year's report and detail tense relations with British officials. The report, which is expected to be released in the coming weeks, does not itself set government policy.

The results of a government review of British telecoms infrastructure are expected later in the year and will include recommendations on managing security risks, including in future 5G networks.

REUTERS

Seven Labour MPs quit party over Brexit, anti-Semitism

LONDON • Seven Labour lawmakers have quit Britain's main opposition party over its leader Jeremy Corbyn's approach to Brexit and a row over anti-Semitism, saying Labour had been "hijacked by the machine politics of the hard left".

Their departure yesterday underlines the mounting frustration with Mr Corbyn's reluctance to change his Brexit strategy and start campaigning for a second referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union.

With slightly more than a month until Britain is set to leave the EU on March 29, divisions over Brexit have fragmented politics, breaking down traditional party lines and creating new coalitions across the country's left-right divide.

"The Labour Party that we joined, that we campaigned for and believed in is no longer today's Labour Party. We did everything we could to save it, but it has now been hijacked by the machine politics of the hard left," lawmaker Chris Leslie told a news conference.

Besides Mr Leslie, the other lawmakers are Ms Luciana Berger, Ms Angela Smith, Mr Gavin Shuker, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr Mike Gapes and Ms Ann Coffey. They will continue to sit as lawmakers in Parliament under the banner "The Independent Group".

Mr Corbyn said in a statement: "I am disappointed these MPs have felt unable to continue to work together for the Labour policies that inspired millions at the last election."

He has been accused by some lawmakers of failing to tackle anti-Semitism in the party, an allegation that has dogged the pro-Palestinian politician since he became the party's leader in 2015.

Ms Berger said the party had become "institutionally anti-Semitic", adding: "I am leaving behind a culture of bullying, bigotry and intimidation."

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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News analysis

Forest fires a burning issue as Indonesia election fight heats up

Camps trade barbs after Sunday's debate between presidential candidates Jokowi and Prabowo



Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja

Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

A day after Indonesia's two presidential candidates went head to head on issues ranging from the economy to the environment, campaign managers from both camps engaged in a heated argument yesterday, and one topic that stood out was forest fire mitigation.

The exchanges were seen as an attempt to back up arguments put forth during the televised 90-minute encounter in a Jakarta hotel on Sunday night, where both men outlined their competing views.

Incumbent Joko Widodo, 57, popularly known as Jokowi, who is seeking a second and final five-year term in office, faces a sole challenger, 67-year-old former army general Prabowo Subianto, in the general election on April 17.

Sunday's debate – in which the candidates tried to sway undecided voters, said to number more than 10 per cent of the total 190 million



Indonesians watching the second presidential debate in Jakarta on Sunday. Indonesian President Joko Widodo and challenger Prabowo Subianto went head to head on issues ranging from the economy to the environment. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

registered voters – was the second of five scheduled debates before the election. The next one will be held on March 17.

A Twitter survey of more than 52,000 Radio Elshinta listeners held after the debate revealed that 64 per cent would support Mr Joko and 34 per cent Mr Prabowo, while 2 per cent were undecided.

Economist Drajad Wibowo, a senior member of Mr Prabowo's campaign team, accused Mr Joko of making false claims during the debate. "He said no more forest fires but the facts on the ground clearly refuted that," he told the popular Elshinta station. "In August 2018, schools in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, were temporarily shut due to forest fire."

Public and private schools in Pontianak were ordered last year by the West Kalimantan

government to close for three days from Aug 20 as the provincial capital was shrouded by choking haze from uncontrolled forest and plantation fires nearby.

Kalimantan, a major island in Indonesia, has an abundance of palm oil plantations.

Senior politician Lukman Edy, representing Mr Joko's campaign, responded to Dr Drajad's claim by clarifying that what Mr Joko meant was that the administration had managed to reduce forest and plantation fires by introducing stricter law enforcement and prevention measures.

"During Jokowi's tenure, forest fires have been handled quickly and the problem did not persist," Mr Lukman said, pointing out that under Mr Joko, the administration witnessed only one major fire, in 2015, while previously, such fires

were annual events.

"We almost never have forest fires any more. Lately, there were hot spots emerging, but firefighting teams promptly handled them. Forest fires are unavoidable, but the government now is there to deal with them, so the problem does not drag on."

Dr Drajad also took issue with the administration's claim of having constructed 191,000km of village roads in the first four years of Mr Joko's five year-term, a figure Dr Drajad found "impossible" – saying that such a distance was almost five times earth's equatorial circumference.

Mr Lukman explained that the village roads are not built in straight lines and therefore such a comparison could not be drawn.

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Prabowo trips over 'unicorns' in debate

JAKARTA • Indonesia's presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto faltered during a televised debate ahead of upcoming elections when his opponent, incumbent President Joko Widodo, used tech jargon in a question.

Mr Joko had asked Mr Prabowo what he would do to support unicorns, a term for start-ups valued at more than US\$1 billion (S\$1.35 billion), in the second presidential debate on Sunday night.

"What do you mean by unicorns? Those online things?" Mr Prabowo, a US-educated former general, asked before engaging in nationalist rhetoric about capital flight. "If we're not careful, the enthusiasm for Internet things, e-commerce and other e-things, will speed up the flight of domestic money to other countries."

Sunday's debate focused on infrastructure, the environment and natural resources, but neither candidate talked about climate change.

The April 17 presidential election will be a repeat of the 2014 vote, when Mr Joko narrowly defeated Mr Prabowo after a divisive campaign period.

During the debate, Mr Joko touted his government's success in overcoming forest fires, which produce smog that often affects neighbouring countries Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

"We don't want forest fires to happen again," he said. "Over the past three years, there have been no forest and peat fires," he added.

But environmental campaigner Greenpeace disputed the Indonesian leader's claim.

"The fact is since the tragic forest fires of 2015, forest and agricultural fires have happened every year," Greenpeace said on Twitter. DPA

Japan frets over 'nightmare' outcome from Trump-Kim summit

TOKYO • When US President Donald Trump sits down to talk peace with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un later this month, one of America's closest allies – Japan – will be looking on with apprehension.

Like the first time Mr Trump met Mr Kim last June, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has found himself on the outside peering in before their second summit set for Feb 27-28 in Hanoi.

The meeting brings both the promise of a less-dangerous North Korea and the potential peril of a weak deal that leaves Japan exposed to Mr Kim's weapons of mass destruction and does nothing to help ease Tokyo's own hostile ties with Pyongyang.

Mr Mitoji Yabunaka, who served as Japan's envoy to six-party talks with North Korea more than a decade ago, said the country feared "a half-baked, deceptive agreement which leads to the Trump administration taking a soft line on North Korea by removing economic sanctions" without serious progress on disarmament. That would be "the nightmare scenario", Mr Yabunaka said.

While Japan and the United States – which guarantees the country's security under a 1960 treaty – both want North Korea to give up its weapons, their interests could diverge as talks progress.

Mr Kim's short- to medium-range rockets pose the most immediate danger to Japan, not the intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that now threaten the American homeland.

Moreover, Mr Trump's unilateral decision to grant Mr Kim's request to suspend US' joint military exercises with South Korea during their first summit has raised concerns about a potential American pull-back after the second.

The presence of some 28,500 American troops on the peninsula provides Japan with a valuable buffer against a rising China, as well as North Korea.

Meanwhile, Mr Abe's efforts to

build a personal rapport with Mr Trump – even recommending him for the Nobel Peace Prize, according to the US President – have shown their limits.

Mr Trump has accused Japan of falling short on troop payments, withdrawn the US from a shared Pacific trade pact and imposed tariffs on the country's metals exports on "national security" grounds.

Japan was also forced to accept bilateral trade talks with the US after Mr Trump threatened similar tariffs on its vital auto industry.

There have been no calls or meetings between Mr Trump and Mr Abe since Nov 30, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

By contrast, they met twice and spoke by phone five times in the three months leading up to the first Trump-Kim summit in June last year, including calls the day before and on the day of the meeting.

Japan plans to invite Mr Trump in May so he can be the first state leader to meet the country's new emperor, according to the Sankei newspaper. The visit will include a golf excursion with Mr Abe, the newspaper said, citing unidentified people familiar with the bilateral relationship.

In Parliament yesterday, Mr Abe praised Mr Trump for acting "decisively towards resolving the issues of the North Korean nuclear and missile problems", while declining to say whether he nominated the US leader for the Nobel prize.

Earlier this month, Mr Abe told lawmakers that he wanted to speak to Mr Trump before the summit.

Former chief South Korean nuclear negotiator Chun Yung-woo has said Japan and his own country share an interest in making sure the North Korean regime gives up all its fissile material.

"Just eliminating ICBMs could be perceived as a US-first policy at the expense of Japan and Korea," Mr Chun said. "That would be very bad. Japan has to make sure that denuclearisation doesn't end there."

BLOOMBERG

Kim-lookalike strikes a pose



Mr Uthen Luangsangthong, a Thai impersonator of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, winning applause during a donation drive at an orphanage in Samut Prakan province on Sunday. The billionaire businessman found out about his resemblance to Mr Kim five years ago after his son, watching a news report about the North Korean leader on television, asked: "What is Papa doing there?" After that, Mr Uthen decided to adopt the haircut and outfit usually associated with Mr Kim, and started making public appearances impersonating him. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

N. Korea faces historic turning point: State media

SEOUL • North Korea is facing a "significant, historic turning point", its state media said yesterday, ahead of a highly anticipated second summit between its leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump.

The meeting between the two leaders – which follows their Singapore summit last June – is scheduled to be held in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi on Feb 27 and 28.

Attention has been focused on whether the American team will offer to lift some economic sanctions on North Korea, in return for the Py-

ongyang regime taking concrete steps towards denuclearisation.

"It is time for us to tighten our shoe strings and run fast, looking for a higher goal as we face this decisive moment," the Rodong Sinmun newspaper said in an editorial.

"Our country is facing a significant, historic turning point," it added, without explicitly referencing the summit.

Earlier this month, Mr Trump tweeted that North Korea will become a "great economic powerhouse" under Mr Kim. "He may sur-

prise some but he won't surprise me, because I have gotten to know him and fully understand how capable he is," said Mr Trump.

The Rodong Sinmun commentary also called on North Koreans to make greater efforts to boost the country's economy.

North Korea is rising as a "strong, socialist nation", and one's true act of patriotism begins at one's workplace, it said. "Each and every product should be made to make our country shine."

North Korea, which holds most of

the peninsula's mineral resources, was once wealthier than the South, but decades of mismanagement and the demise of its former paymaster the Soviet Union have left it deeply impoverished.

In 2017, the United Nations Security Council banned the North's main exports – coal and other mineral resources, fisheries and textile products – to cut off its access to hard currency in response to Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

India says mastermind of Kashmir bombing killed in clash



Indian army soldiers on patrol yesterday near the site of last Thursday's bomb attack in Pulwama, Kashmir. The suicide attack has sparked outrage in India with calls for revenge circulating on social media and rising animosity towards Kashmiri Muslims in other parts of the Hindu-majority country. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

He's one of three Pakistani militants killed, following last week's suicide hit in Kashmir

SRINAGAR (India) • Indian security forces yesterday killed three militants, including the suspected organiser of a suicide bombing in the disputed region of Kashmir that has fuelled tensions between India and Pakistan, police said.

The suicide bomb attack on a paramilitary police convoy in Indian-controlled Kashmir last Thursday killed at least 40 men, the deadliest single attack on Indian forces in 30 years of insurgency in the Muslim-majority region.

The Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) has claimed responsibility for the attack. India accuses Pakistan of harbouring the group. Pakistan denies that. Both countries have nuclear arms.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, facing an election that must be held by May, is under domestic pressure for decisive action against Pakistan. He has promised a strong response and says he has given the military a free hand to tackle cross-border militancy.

The three militants killed in the clash yesterday were all Pakistani nationals and members of JeM, two security sources said. "The encounter is still in progress and the security forces are on the job," police said in a statement.

But the fighting, which ended after 17 hours, came at a cost for India's security services. Four Indian soldiers and a policeman were killed, while nine troops were wounded. A civilian was also killed.

Security sources said one of the dead militants had been identified as Abdul Rashid Gazi, who went by the alias Kamran Bhui. It is believed he played a leading role in organising last Thursday's attack.

Indian troops had earlier cordoned off Pinglan village in Kashmir's Pulwama district, where the attack took place.

On Sunday, police said Indian forces had detained 23 men suspected of links to the militants who carried out the bombing.

Kashmir is at the heart of decades of hostility between India and Pakistan. They both claim it in full but rule it in part.

India withdrew trade privileges offered to Pakistan after the bomb attack and has warned of further action.

The United States has told India it supported its right to defend itself against cross-border attacks, New Delhi said last Saturday.

With tensions mounting, Pakistan has withdrawn its envoy to India for consultations, a spokesman for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said

on Twitter yesterday.

Last Thursday's bomb attack has sparked outrage in India with calls for revenge circulating on social media, and rising animosity towards Kashmiri Muslims in other parts of

the Hindu-majority country, to the alarm of rights groups.

"We are at a dangerous moment and the authorities must do everything they can to uphold the rule of law," said Mr Aakar Patel, head of Amnesty India.

The All India Cine Workers Association has called for a "total ban" on Pakistanis working in India's film industry, though most have

been blacklisted from Bollywood since a similar attack in Kashmir in 2016, in which 19 soldiers died.

The Confederation of All India Traders called for a nationwide strike to protest against the attack, and footage from Reuters partner ANI showed shuttered shops in several states yesterday. REUTERS

SEE OPINION A26

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MRAAKAR PATEL, head of Amnesty India.

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News analysis

Mahathir upsets allies by forging new ties

Premier warns coalition partners against betrayal as he continues to welcome opposition members



Shannon Teoh

Malaysia Bureau Chief
Kuala Lumpur

Tensions are rising in Malaysia's ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad continues to welcome opposition members to his camp while saying that he will not hesitate to abandon his current partners if "they are not loyal to the country".

Tun Dr Mahathir had already ruffled feathers when he announced last Friday that his Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) would stretch its wings into Sabah – reneging on a deal with PH partners already established in the eastern state – ostensibly to allow former Umno members to join the coalition. Among them are five MPs and eight assemblymen who have refused to take up residence in existing Sabah parties. Then, it was revealed that the Premier had brokered a deal to obtain the backing of Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) to fend off any possible internal coup against him.

"If DAP, Keadilan, Amanah betray and are no longer loyal to the country, I will switch to other parties. We are mobile, we are not fixed," Dr Mahathir said when welcoming seven former Umno MPs – who quit the scandal-hit party after it lost power in last May's general election – into PPBM last Tuesday.

The reference to PH allies, the Democratic Action Party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and Parti Amanah Negara, at first appeared to be hypothetical, to justify taking in leaders of the previous long-ruling Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

But now it seems to be akin to a warning shot across the bow, after PAS officials began referring publicly to rumours of a vote of no-confidence in Dr Mahathir's leadership. The Islamist party has become a fierce rival to erstwhile allies, DAP as well as PKR president Anwar Ibrahim, who is waiting to become premier, according to PH's transition plan, albeit one without an official firm timeline.

PAS secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan said a "sample"



Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (centre) launching the National Community Policy on Sunday. He already ruffled feathers when he announced last Friday that his Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia would stretch its wings into Sabah – reneging on a deal with Pakatan Harapan partners already established in the eastern state. PHOTO: BERNAMA.

letter of support given to Dr Mahathir – which the PM affirmed – during a Friday meeting with the Islamist party's president, Mr Abdul Hadi Awang, was to indicate "backing" only in the event of "a vote of no confidence".

"We know Parliament will resume in March, and this began with Dr Mahathir's statement. Tun mentioned it (betrayal) and politicians understand," the PAS secretary-general said on Sunday.

Datuk Seri Anwar, for his part, has denied the existence of any plan for a coup, dismissing the allegation as "a PAS attempt to deflect the focus on the money taken from IMDB". The PKR leader, who only last week said he expected to be prime minister in two years, was referring to a probe into allegations that PAS leaders received RM90 million (\$30 million) from Umno prior to last year's general election.

Two PKR vice-presidents and several DAP leaders have publicly rebuked PPBM for the "betrayal" in accepting former Umno "rubbish".

Other PH members in Sabah, who have backed the chief minister and president of the Warisan party, Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, have expressed shock at the PPBM move, with Luyang assemblyman Phoong Jin Zhe denouncing it as "a stab in the back".

But, in a short statement yesterday, Mr Shafie chose not to rebuke PPBM although he pointed out that Sabahans gave his "Parti Warisan Sabah the mandate to govern... they were fed up with the Umno-BN government and wanted a change for the better".

Dr Mahathir, 93, returned to power after PH's shock win in the polls last May 9, but his party made up only 13 of the 122 MPs in PH and Parti Warisan Sabah. PPBM's strength, however, has now grown to 22 MPs, with at least five more set to join in Sabah. At this juncture, the majority of the MPs from Dr Mahathir's party would have won their seats as Umno members.

Singapore Institute of International Affairs senior fellow Oh Ei Sun told The Straits Times

that Dr Mahathir "is not happy that he is constrained by DAP and PKR", which collectively have 92 MPs.

"So he is broadening PH. This does not mean he wants to stay on forever, but that his legacy must stay forever. Of course, this also checkmates Anwar, so he is killing two birds with one stone," Mr Oh said.

Not all of Dr Mahathir's PH partners are upset at an expanding PPBM. PKR deputy president Azmin Ali, who leads a rival faction to Mr Anwar in the party, said the defecting Umno leaders "can go to the ground and meet Umno members to explain the need to leave their rotten party".

Mr Eekmal Ahmad, special officer to PKR's Selangor chief minister, also said those criticising Dr Mahathir's "consolidation of power... do not understand political dynamics" of the crucial Malay majority. "PKR or Bersatu are all in Harapan. A strong Bersatu means a strong PKR," he added.

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WARNING SHOT

If DAP, Keadilan, Amanah betray and are no longer loyal to the country, I will switch to other parties. We are mobile, we are not fixed.



MALAYSIA PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMAD, when welcoming seven former Umno MPs into PPBM last Tuesday.

Malaysian minister to marry property developer



News of Ms Yeo Bee Yin being in a relationship with Mr Lee Yeow Seng broke in December last year. PHOTOS: ST FILE, IOI PROPERTIES



KUALA LUMPUR • The stage is set for one of Malaysia's biggest weddings of the year.

The banquet dinner of property developer Lee Yeow Seng and Energy, Science, Technology, Climate Change and Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin will be held on March 29.

Invitation cards have been sent to family members, friends, and business and political figures. The dinner will be held at Le Meridien Putrajaya.

Rumours of the 36-year-old Ms Yeo getting hitched had been floating on social media since earlier this month when a Chinese daily quoted an unnamed family friend

as saying that the wedding would be held at the end of March.

Malaysian singers Fich Leong and Michael Wong are reported to be the invited artistes.

News of Ms Yeo being in a relationship with Mr Lee, 40, the youngest son of tycoon Lee Shin Cheng, broke in December last year after one of her friends uploaded a picture of himself posing with the couple.

He wrote: "Warning: This photo

will make many guys cry. Yeo Bee Yin just introduced her special boyfriend to me."

Although Ms Yeo has kept mum about the wedding, this has not stopped Malaysians from congratulating the couple.

"Everyone is happy for you, Yeo Bee Yin. We are rejoicing as (if) our family members (are) getting married," Cattleya Yin said on Facebook.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Japan trial to treat spinal cord injuries with stem cells

TOKYO • A team of Japanese researchers will carry out an unprecedented trial using a kind of stem cell to try and treat debilitating spinal cord injuries.

The specialists at Tokyo's Keio University yesterday said they have received government approval for a trial using so-called induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells – which have the potential to develop into any cell in the body – to treat patients with serious spinal cord injuries.

The trial, expected to begin later this year, will seek four patients who suffered their injuries just 14 to 28 days earlier – the period in which the treatment is believed to be effective, the university said.

The team will transplant two million iPS cells into the spines of the patients, who will then go through

rehabilitation and be monitored for a year.

The strict limitations on the number of participants is necessary because the process is an "unprecedented, world-first clinical trial", the university added.

"It's been 20 years since I started researching cell treatment. Finally, we can start a clinical trial," Dr Hideyuki Okano, a professor of physiology, said at a press conference. "We want to do our best to establish safety and provide the treatment to patients."

The study will be carried out on patients aged 18 or older who have completely lost their motor and sensory functions.

Japan has more than 100,000 patients who are paralysed due to spinal cord injuries, but there is no effective treatment.

The primary purpose of the trial is to confirm the safety of the transplanted cells and the method of the transplant, the researchers said.

The research team hopes to test the efficacy and safety of the treatment for chronic injuries as well in the future if they can confirm the safety of the technique through the clinical trial.

The announcement comes after researchers in Kyoto last November said they had transplanted iPS cells into the brain of a patient in a bid to cure Parkinson's disease.

The man was stable after the operation and he is being monitored for two years.

The researchers injected 2.4 million iPS cells into the left side of the patient's brain in an operation that took about three hours.

Parkinson's disease is a chronic, degenerative neurological disorder that affects the body's motor system, often causing shaking and other difficulties in movement.

iPS cells are created by stimulating mature, already specialised, cells back into a juvenile state – basically cloning without the need for an embryo.

The cells can be transformed into a range of different types of cells, and their use is a key sector of medical research. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Toddler in Malaysia dies after falling onto knife

IPOH • A two-year-old girl in Ipoh died after falling onto a kitchen knife, which pierced her abdomen at her home on Sunday, Bernama newsagency reported.

Nur Qhaisara Medina Supian was pronounced dead at the Parit Buntar Hospital.

Her mother, Ms Hana Mazlan, 27, said the incident occurred at their

home in Kampung Teluk Piai Baroh at about 9.30am, when she was putting her four-month-old baby to sleep in the kitchen.

"Nur Qhaisara Medina had asked for milk but I told her to wait. She then went to her grandmother, who was also in the kitchen, before accidentally stepping on a plate.

"She suddenly fell and the knife,

which was placed on the plate, pierced her left abdomen. The knife was used by her brother to peel mangoes. I didn't notice that it was there," Ms Hana told reporters at the Raja Permaisuri Bainun Hospital, where the child's body had been sent for an autopsy.

Ms Hana said her daughter passed out after her mother-in-law

pulled the 15cm knife out.

"We rushed her to a clinic before being referred to the Parit Buntar Hospital, where she was pronounced dead," she said.

Bernama reported the victim's 42-year-old father, Mr Supian Sam-suri, as saying his fourth child was buried yesterday at the Kampung Teluk Piai Baroh Muslim cemetery.

China charts timeline for Greater Bay Area integration plan

Beijing aims to boost collaboration among 11 cities, including HK and Macau, by 2022

Claire Huang
Hong Kong Correspondent

HONG KONG • The Chinese authorities have unveiled a timeline to further integrate Hong Kong and Macau into the mainland under the ambitious Greater Bay Area plan to create a cluster of world-class cities in southern China.

An 11-chapter document released last night by the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party states that the 11 cities in the plan would boost collaboration by 2022 in areas including the central pillar that is science and technology, intellectual property rights and even ecological conservation.

By 2035, the region would have developed an economic system largely driven by innovation.

The plan involves linking 11 cities in the Pearl River Delta area within a two-hour radius of Hong Kong. It

comprises Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhongshan, Foshan, Zhaoqing and Jiangmen.

Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macau were identified by Beijing as core engines for driving growth in nearby regions.

Under the road map, Hong Kong would build on its status as an international financial, transportation and trade hub. The city would focus on offshore yuan, international asset management and risk management, as well as developing innovation and technology industries.

Beijing also outlined its support for Hong Kong becoming the hub for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam has welcomed the blueprint, and thanked the central government “for placing importance on the views of the Hong Kong gov-

ernment”. The government issued a statement saying: “The development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area is not only a new attempt to break new ground in the country’s pursuit of opening up on all fronts in a new era, but also a further step in taking forward the implementation of ‘one country, two systems’.”

Guangzhou would strengthen its function as an international commerce and industry hub, while Shenzhen would bank on its strength as home to China’s innovation and technology giants and be turned into a special economic zone.

Macau would focus on being the “world centre for tourism and leisure” and act as a bridge to Portuguese-speaking countries.

Ms Ayesha Lau, the Hong Kong managing partner at KPMG China, noted that Beijing has a lot riding on the Bay Area plan, given that the trade war with the United States “really highlights the risk of China being isolated in the world”.

“China needs more engines for economic growth. It can no longer rely on exports. It must generate



The Zhuhai Grand Theatre, a new landmark in Zhuhai, one of the 11 cities of the Pearl River Delta that will be part of the Greater Bay Area. Under the plan, Hong Kong would build on its status as an international financial, transportation and trade hub. PHOTO: WWW.BAYAREA.GOV.HK



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

more internal demand,” she said, adding that the Bay Area is “an ideal place” for China to try out new initiatives aligned with the country’s opening up policy before rolling

them out at a national level. Still, significant doubts remain as to how the scheme could work, given all the different legal and tax systems in the area.

Professor Chen Guanghan of Sun Yat-sen University, who is also vice-dean of the Research Institute of the Development of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, said the plan “would face many problems in trying to integrate these different systems”.

“In this case, the central government should allow the local authorities to have space to explore what can be done,” he added.

The Bay Area plan reflects China’s innovation and technology ambitions and is aligned with its Made in China 2025 masterplan: a 10-year road map for the future of the manufacturing sector.

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• Additional reporting by Chong Koh Ping

Saudi Prince starts Asia tour, pledges \$27b for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD • Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said his country plans to invest a whopping US\$20 billion (S\$27 billion) in Pakistan as he began a swing through Asia, at a time when his country’s ties with the West have waned.

The two nations signed memorandums of understanding in the energy and agriculture sectors, including one for a US\$10 billion oil refinery in the south-western city of Gwadar, where China has helped build a deep water port. Saudi Arabia also signed a pact to provide Pakistan with crude oil and petroleum products on delayed payments to meet its energy needs.

“We are creating a great future for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan,” Prince Mohammed, the kingdom’s de facto ruler, said at a reception by Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad on Sunday, at the start of a two-day trip.

Prince Mohammed gave no time frame for the US\$20 billion in projects, which would dwarf the roughly US\$53 million Saudi Ara-

bia has invested in Pakistan in the last three years.

The Crown Prince also “ordered the immediate release of 2,107 Pakistani prisoners”, after a request by the Pakistani Prime Minister, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said in a post on Twitter.

Prince Mohammed’s stop in Pakistan is the first leg of a broader Asia trip that will also take him to India, South Korea and China, where he is scheduled to meet President Xi Jinping. He plans to head to India today after postponing his trips to Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Crown Prince’s plan to forge closer ties with Asia’s largest economies comes as Saudi Arabia’s relationships with the West have frayed over the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, allegedly by Saudi security agents, in Istanbul. The Saudi authorities have repeatedly denied the Prince’s involvement and said Mr Khashoggi was killed by government agents in a botched plan to force his return home.

Prince Mohammed’s investment plans may assist Mr Khan’s efforts to revive an economy hurt by widening current account and fiscal deficits. They may also help Pakistan become less reliant on China, which is investing about US\$60 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Saudi Arabia has already given a US\$3 billion loan to Pakistan, while the United Arab Emirates provided another US\$1 billion to help South Asia’s second-biggest economy avert a financial crisis. Pakistani Finance Minister Asad Umar said this month that the nation is close to signing a bailout package with the International Monetary Fund to boost its dwindling foreign reserves.

Prince Mohammed’s visit to Islamabad and New Delhi comes at a time of renewed tensions between



Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan (left) and visiting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in a horse-drawn carriage on their way to the Presidential Palace in Islamabad to meet President Arif Alvi. PHOTO: DPA

nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan. About 40 Indian paramilitary personnel died during a suicide bombing in the disputed region of Kashmir last week. India blames Pakistan for the attack, a

claim denied by Islamabad.

Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir told a press conference in Islamabad yesterday: “Our objective is to try to de-escalate tensions between the

two countries, neighbouring countries, and to see if there is a path forward to resolving those differences peacefully.”

BLOOMBERG, REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Australia defends award of \$407m PNG camp contract to obscure firm

SYDNEY • Australian officials yesterday defended the award of lucrative contracts to an obscure firm with a beach shack as its registered office, saying they were in a hurry to find a company to provide services at Pacific refugee camps.

Singapore-registered Paladin Holdings was awarded more than A\$420 million (S\$407 million) – about A\$17 million a month – in contracts to provide services at three transition centres for refugees on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island.

The operations are part of Canberra’s harsh policy of processing asylum seekers who try to reach Australia by boat at remote offshore Pacific camps, where hundreds of refugees have been stranded for five years.

But questions have been raised about why Paladin was given the contracts after local media reported the firm had little experience, was thinly capitalised and had ties to a senior PNG politician.

The Australian Financial Review said Paladin’s registered of-

fice in Australia was a beach shack on Kangaroo Island, a sanctuary for native wildlife off the coast of South Australia.

After the reports surfaced last week, Paladin changed its registered address to an office in the capital Canberra, the newspaper said yesterday.

Home Affairs officials grilled about the issue at parliamentary hearings yesterday said they resorted to a closed tender – only approaching one company to bid – as PNG suddenly pulled out in

mid-2017 from plans to manage the process.

With the Australian-run camp due to close by end-October 2017, after a PNG court ruled it was unconstitutional, the officials said they had to act quickly to find a company to manage three replacement transition centres.

Paladin emerged as the main contender as it served as a subcontractor to previous PNG detention service providers, the officials said.

They added that other firms which previously bid for contracts

indicated there was too much “noise” over running Canberra’s asylum offshore detention facilities.

“We were dealing with an urgent situation,” Home Affairs Secretary Mike Pezzullo told the parliamentary committee.

Attorney-General Christian Porter on Sunday defended the contracts but said reports of links between Paladin and the Manus-based family of a senior PNG politician would “have to be investigated thoroughly”.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WorldBriefs

EU vows swift response if US imposes car tariffs

BRUSSELS • The European Union promises a quick and effective response if the United States imposes import duties on European cars, a spokesman for the European Commission said yesterday.

Brussels issued the threat after the US Commerce Department filed a report yesterday that empowers President Donald Trump to apply car duties within the next 90 days.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has described as “frightening” the prospect that this report could label European car imports as a national security threat to the US, enabling the tariffs. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Taiwan slams Spain for deporting duo to China

TAIPEI • Taiwan hit out at Spain yesterday after two Taiwanese fraud suspects were deported to China despite objections from the government in Taipei and human rights groups.

Returning Taiwanese criminals to China has become a major source of friction between Beijing and Taipei – and illustrates Taiwan’s isolated diplomatic status.

Taiwan’s Criminal Investigation Bureau said more than 400 Taiwanese fraud suspects arrested abroad have been deported to China since April 2016. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Mongolia suspends KFC after hundreds fall sick

ULAANBAATAR • Forty-two people in Mongolia have been hospitalised and hundreds are showing symptoms of illness from contaminated water and soda that the health authorities have linked to a KFC outlet in the capital Ulaanbaatar.

The authorities from the Metropolitan Professional Inspection Agency said the local licence-holder of the KFC franchise, Tavan Bogd Group, was responsible for the 247 cases of diarrhoea, vomiting and fever reported this month.

Officials said they found serious violations in health standards and a failure in internal hygiene controls. Laboratory tests detected bacteria in the drinking water and E. coli in soda.

Operations at all KFC branches in Mongolia were suspended from yesterday for inspections to be carried out, Xinhua reported. BLOOMBERG

British MPs want code of ethics for social media firms

They take Facebook and other tech giants to task over fake news, abuse of users' data

LONDON • Facebook and other big tech companies should be subject to a compulsory code of ethics to tackle the spread of fake news, the abuse of users' data and the bullying of smaller firms, British lawmakers said yesterday.

In a damning report that singled out Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg for what it said was a failure of leadership and personal responsibility, the UK Parliament's digital, culture, media and sport committee said the companies had proved ineffective in stopping harmful content and disinformation on their platforms.

"The guiding principle of the 'move fast and break things' culture often seems to be that it is better to apologise than ask permission", said committee chairman Damian Collins. "We need a radical shift in the balance of power between the platforms and the people."

Mr Collins also said the age of inadequate self-regulation must come to an end.

"The rights of the citizen need to be established in statute, by requiring the tech companies to adhere to a code of conduct written into law

by Parliament, and overseen by an independent regulator," he said.

In response, Facebook said it is "open to meaningful regulation".

"We are open to meaningful regulation and support the committee's recommendation for electoral law reform," said Facebook's public policy manager Karim Palant.

He added that Facebook is "not the same company" it was a year ago and had already made substantial changes to its procedures.

Facebook became the focus of the committee's 18-month inquiry after whistleblower Christopher Wylie alleged that political consultancy Cambridge Analytica had obtained the data of millions of users of the social network.

Mr Zuckerberg apologised last

year for a "breach of trust" over the scandal.

But he refused to appear three times before British lawmakers, a stance that showed "contempt" towards Parliament and the members of nine legislatures from around the world, the committee said.

"We believe that in its evidence to the committee Facebook has often deliberately sought to frustrate our work, by giving incomplete, disingenuous and at times misleading answers to our questions," Mr Collins said.

"Mark Zuckerberg continually fails to show the levels of leadership and personal responsibility that should be expected from someone who sits at the top of one of the world's biggest companies."

Mr Collins also identified major threats to society from the dominance of giant tech companies such as Facebook – which owns Instagram and WhatsApp – Google and Twitter.

Democracy is at risk from the malicious and relentless targeting of citizens with disinformation and personalised adverts from unidentified sources, the report said, and social media platforms are failing to act against harmful content and respect the privacy of users.

Companies like Facebook are also using their size to bully smaller firms that relied on social media platforms to reach customers, it added. REUTERS

New Zealand aims to make tech giants pay digital services tax

WELLINGTON • New Zealand said yesterday that it plans to update its laws so it can tax revenue earned by multinational digital companies such as Google, Facebook and Amazon, extending an international effort to bring global tech giants into the tax net.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the Cabinet had agreed to issue a discussion document on how to update the country's tax framework to ensure multinational companies pay their fair share.

"Our current tax system is not fair in the way it treats individual tax payers, and how it treats multinationals," Ms Ardern said at her weekly post-Cabinet news conference.

Highly digitalised companies, such as those offering social media networks, trading platforms and online advertising, currently earn a significant income from New Zealand consumers without being liable for income tax, the government said in

a statement released after the announcement.

The value of cross-border digital services in New Zealand has been estimated at NZ\$2.7 billion (\$\$2.5 billion).

The revenue estimate for a digital services tax is between NZ\$30 million and NZ\$80 million, Finance Minister Grant Robertson said in the statement.

Digital services taxes (DST) are generally charged at a flat rate of 2 per cent to 3 per cent on the gross revenue earned by a multinational company in that country.

A number of other countries – including Austria, Britain, France, India, Italy and Spain – have already enacted or announced plans for a DST.

The European Union and Australia are also consulting on a DST.

New Zealand officials will now finalise the discussion document on the matter, which is likely to be publicly released by May. REUTERS



Europe wonders whether to bring back kids raised under ISIS

RANST (Belgium) • The children's voices crackled through the phone and into the grey-walled living room of Ms Fatiha's home.

"When are we going to grandma's?" one implored in the background, and then into the phone: "Are you coming to get us?"

In the hallway, six coat hooks were fixed in a row at child's height. A backpack hung on each one. Up a steep stairway, sheets with characters from the Pixar movie Cars were carefully tucked into bunk beds, awaiting the children's return.

But Ms Fatiha, 46, a Belgian whose grandparents emigrated from Morocco, did not know when her six grandchildren – who range in age from 10 months to seven years – would be back.

They are among the hundreds of children born to European citizens who went to fight for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Now that the caliphate has collapsed, and the planned US withdrawal has compounded regional instability, grandparents across Europe are pushing to save children whom in some cases they have seen only in photos.

"We're waiting for them," Ms Fatiha said at her home outside Antwerp, in a bucolic village where backyards give way to hay fields.

The children's fathers are dead, and their mothers – Ms Fatiha's daughter and daughter-in-law – face jail time if they return home.

For Belgium, France and other countries that saw some of their nationals gravitate towards ISIS territory as it expanded across Syria and Iraq, the plight of children who have claims to citizenship has ignited questions that would test the most Solomonic of judges.

Governments are grappling with how much responsibility they bear for the safety of these small citizens, most of them younger than six, in a region where fresh conflict could erupt.

Courts are weighing whether the rights of the children extend to returning with their ISIS parents. A bitter public debate is under way about whether grandparents whose own children ran away to join ISIS can be trusted to raise a new generation differently.

The Kurdish authorities who control the territory in north-eastern Syria where many of these families ended up estimate they have more than 1,300 children in their refugee and prison camps.

Russia repatriated 27 children last week. France is considering bringing back more than 100 fighters – who would face trial – and



Ms Fatiha looking over the backpacks she has prepared for her six grandchildren at her home in Ranst, Belgium. A "Spider-Man" bedsheet and teddy bears (far left) on one of the beds she has ready. But there is no knowing if and when the children – now in a camp in Syria – can return. PHOTOS: WASHINGTON POST

their families. But until now, most governments have calculated that the political downside of retrieving parents who may pose national security risks outweighs any need to bring back the children.

In Ms Fatiha's case, a judge has ruled that Belgium must repatriate her six grandchildren, along with their mothers – Belgian citizens who joined ISIS and now want to come back. The two women were convicted in absentia of joining a

terrorist group and would each face a five-year prison sentence upon their arrival on Belgian soil.

The ruling last Dec 26 has spurred a furious response from Belgian leaders, and the government plans to appeal in court tomorrow. The authorities expect whatever precedent is set to affect decisions about other ISIS families.

At least 22 Belgian children are in Syrian camps, and more than 160 are believed to be in the conflict zone.

The most vociferous objections relate to the return of the parents. Even for the children, Belgian sympathy goes only so far. Many people are anxious.

Belgium contributed the largest number of ISIS fighters to Syria per capita of any European Union nation, and the country remains scarred by the attacks of 2016, when Belgian citizens with ISIS connections targeted Brussels with deadly bombings. WASHINGTON POST

Be tolerant, China Daily urges after Zara's ad faces flak

BEIJING • Fashion brand Zara was recently criticised when one of its advertisements which featured a female Chinese model was accused of "defaming the Chinese".

The ad, titled "Beauty is here", stars a Chinese woman wearing the brand's clothes and aims to introduce new cosmetics. It was released last Friday on the Spanish label's official website.

After Zara shared it on Sina Weibo, China's equivalent to Twitter, some netizens noted that the model had freckles on her face, suggesting that by selecting her, Zara might mean to "defame the Chi-

nese", because a perfect face should be without any freckles.

Some also added that the model in the photo did not appear to be in a good, energetic mood.

"Does Zara mean all Asian girls have freckles on their faces?" read one of the comments which went viral. "Can't believe they picked a freckled face on behalf of Asian females," said another.

Some of the comments, deleted soon after being posted, even suggested Zara might mean to "insult" China, as the Italian brand Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) did last November.

D&G is reeling from a boycott in

China after its calamitous advertising campaign of a Chinese woman struggling to eat spaghetti and pizza with chopsticks that was decried as racist.

In the Zara case, however, the majority of the comments voiced support for the label.

"It is OK for anyone to have a freckled face, so why can't a model?" another viral comment read.

Last Saturday, Zara responded that it meant no harm.

The company said photos of the model were taken in an all-natural way, without any software manipulation, and the reactions might just

be differences in aesthetics.

By Sunday evening, the hashtag #Zara responds about the Chinese model advertisement# had been read 460 million times on the Weibo platform.

In a bid to calm the situation, state-run media China Daily said in an editorial that those who complained about Zara's new ad might be trying to protect the nation's image but their actions also show "over-sensitivity and a lack of cultural confidence".

It shows they are so afraid of being hurt that they tend to take a defensive gesture against any move



Some Chinese netizens say a new Zara ad featuring a freckled Chinese model is an insult. State-run media says the comments show "a lack of cultural confidence". PHOTO: SCREENGRAB FROM ZARACN

they do not understand, it added.

"Cultural confidence is just being promoted by the leadership of this country, and tolerance is an essential part of it. Only when we learn to tolerate each other in terms of aes-

thetics will cultural confidence be owned by everyone," said the editorial published on China's Daily's website on Sunday.

CHINA DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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The Straits Times says

Budget links past, present and future

The Budget presented yesterday commits substantial amounts to strengthening Singapore as a historically aware, inclusive and forward-looking society. It seeks to unite the past, the present and the future, by adopting both a generational and a sectoral approach. The \$6.1 billion that will be set aside under the Merdeka Generation Package is a concrete demonstration of national gratitude for those who are now aged between 59 and 69. Even as this generation enters its silver years, other Singaporeans gained from the Merdeka-era legacy it helped build: an economy that was modernised; the build-up of public services; strengthening defence preparedness; and forging a multiracial society. In that spirit, the \$1.1 billion Bicentennial

Bonus was another way of commemorating Singapore's history from its very founding. It will benefit, among others, 1.4 million lower-income Singaporeans. Yet another measure to improve citizens' lives is the \$3.1 billion being set aside, in addition to the \$2 billion earmarked last year, to fund long-term care support measures.

Complementing these initiatives, around \$4.6 billion will be invested to boost businesses and to support Singaporean workers over the next three years. Of this amount, \$3.6 billion will go towards helping workers amid industry and technological disruptions, while \$1 billion will contribute to assisting firms build what Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat called "deep enterprise" capabilities.

These capabilities are vital hallmarks of companies that are strong and competitive because they maximise value creation. But firms cannot do so unless employees, too, possess "deep worker" capabilities – by upskilling and reskilling – and use that to benefit from opportunities here and abroad. The emphasis on skills, which has always been a requirement for Singapore's success, is now an urgent need as the speed of technological advancement and convergence has created new demands from the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The tripartite partnership of capital, labour and Government must be mindful of the progress of this revolution, which will be marked by both severe disruption and a flowering of opportunities.

The Budget aims to position Singapore's economy to deal with this inevitability. Corporate and labour habits must keep pace with the direction and demands of change if Singapore is to be able to generate revenues that will make generous Budgets possible in future. This year's Budget represents a combination of measures designed to provide a fillip to the economy while targeting the financial needs of pockets of the population. Fiscal discipline finances social responsibility. Targeted benefits also have a broader effect by reducing the economic pressure felt by those who need to care for the elderly or those in poor health. Everyone gains from a realistic Budget that addresses existing needs, and yet prepares for the future.

By Invitation

Women's quest for justice and equality – a short history

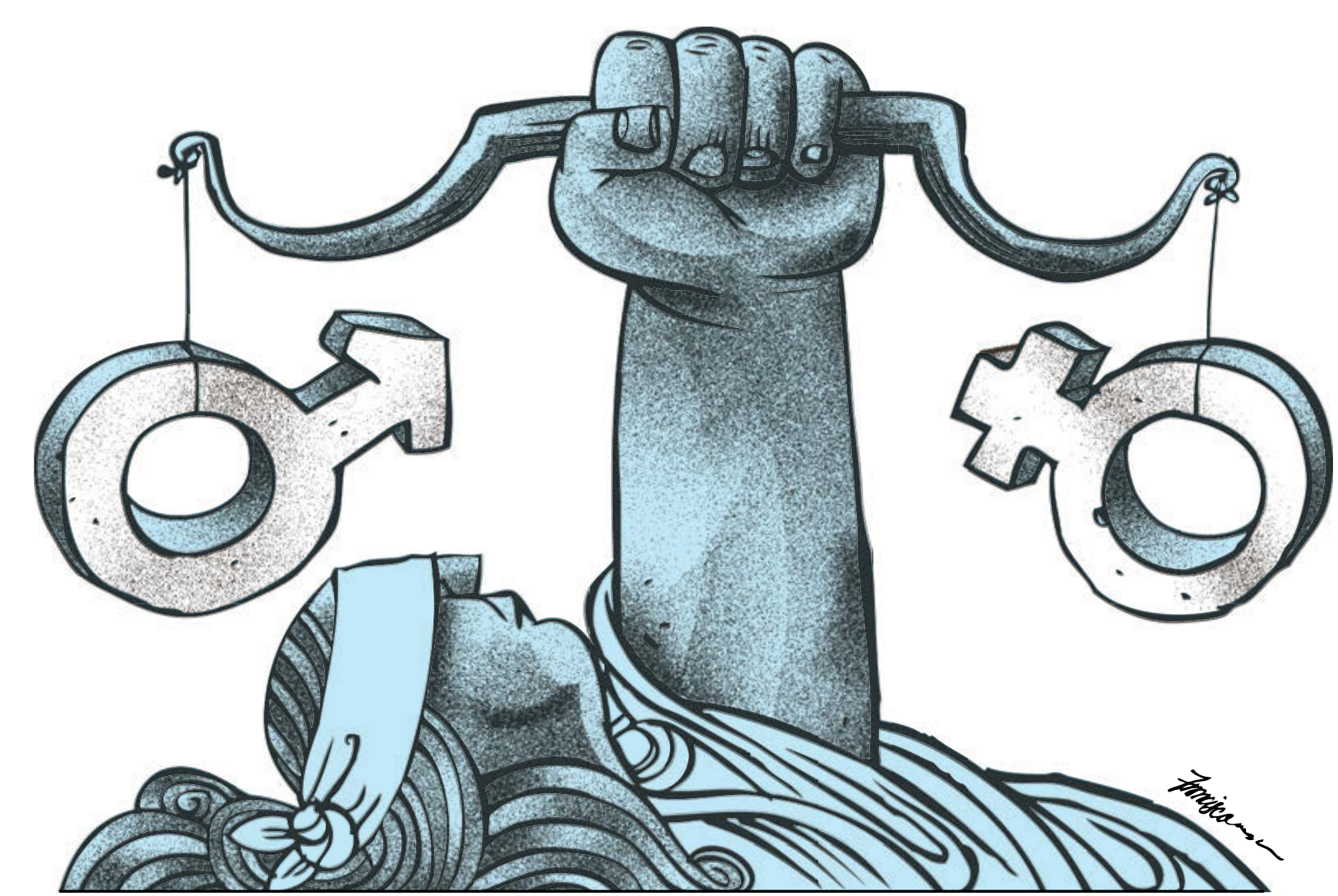
Singapore women have done well in achieving parity with men but in other parts of the world, the struggle continues



Tommy Koh
For The Straits Times

Women's rights are human rights. The struggle for women for justice and equality is one of the longest in the history of human rights. Although much progress has been made, the struggle is not over in some parts of the world. Boys and girls are born equal. Inequality sets in as they grow up. The causes are many, with history, religion and culture all playing a part. In the ancient world, women were treated as chattel. They could be bought or sold. Women had to marry the men chosen for them. They had no legal personality. They could not own property. They had no freedom of movement. Men's oppression of women is therefore an evil which has ancient roots. Religion has generally reinforced gender inequality with precepts and doctrines that subordinate women to men. Some Christian denominations bar women from the priesthood or leadership positions. In Islam, women face restrictions on leading public prayers. According to some Buddhist texts, women can attain Buddhahood only by first being reborn as men. In Hindu literature, women are sometimes depicted as being weak, sinful and irresponsible. The two religions which treat men and women equally are Sikhism and Baha'ism. Confucius taught that a daughter should obey her father, a wife her husband and a widow her son. Confucianism has had a pernicious influence on the status of women in Asia as it continues to influence the behaviour of men towards women in North-east and South-east Asia. The male chauvinist teachings of Confucius may be the reason why societies in these parts of Asia have such low fertility rates.

COLONIAL SINGAPORE
What was the situation in colonial Singapore? The British rulers of Singapore were all men. Reflecting the attitude back home, their attitude towards women was unenlightened. Professor Aline Wong, in her book *Women In Modern Singapore*, described the situation in colonial Singapore in the following way: "The cultural traditions of the



major ethnic communities in Singapore place a greater premium on the male compared with the female. Whether born as a Chinese, an Indian or a Malay, a woman is subjected to sociocultural and religious pressures to conform to the roles of wife and mother and to lead a secluded life." Although several women's leaders such as Shirin Fozdar, Seow Peck Leng and May Wong had petitioned the British Governor and the British Parliament to abolish polygamy, their petition was rejected. Chinese men were free to have as many wives and concubines as they wished. Women occupied an inferior status during British rule. In 1877, the British Government established the Chinese Protectorate. Its objective was to look after the needs of the Chinese community. To its credit, the protectorate did try to tackle the problem of the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution. They also tried to ensure that the sale of young girls to rich families as *muitsai* was not a form of slavery.

WOMEN'S CHARTER OF 1961
In its early days, the People's Action Party (PAP) was a revolutionary

party. In 1959, it campaigned for the policy of one man, one wife. In 1961, the Singapore Government enacted the Women's Charter. It was nothing less than the Magna Carta for women in Singapore. What are the most important provisions of the Women's Charter?

- First, it abolished polygamy for all non-Muslim men and required that all future marriages be registered.
- Second, a married woman could continue to use her own name.
- Third, husband and wife were treated as equal partners in a marriage.
- Fourth, women had the right to own, buy and sell property.
- Fifth, the Charter safeguards the rights of women in matters relating to marriage and divorce.
- Sixth, the Charter also protects the right of the wife to matrimonial assets, maintenance and the custody of children.

THE PAP AND WOMEN
In the 1950s and 1960s, the PAP had several women leaders such as Chan Choy Siong. It was a pro-woman party. However, by the 1970s and 1980s, the PAP no longer had any women

in its leadership. The party drifted away from its origin and became anti-women. Let me cite three examples to support my point.

Quota for women in medical school
In 1979, the Minister for Health, Dr Toh Chin Chye, announced that women would be restricted to one-third of the intake for medical school. This unreasonable discrimination against women was abolished only in 2003.

Lower admission requirements for male students
In 1983, the National University of Singapore modified its entry requirements for male students. Why? In order to prevent any imbalance in the sex ratio in favour of women. Speaking in justification of this discrimination, the NUS vice-chancellor, Professor Lim Pin, said that a gender imbalance in the university would only aggravate the "problem of having unmarried graduate women".

Home economics not for boys
In 1984, the Ministry of Education stopped all Secondary 1 and Secondary 2 girls from taking technical studies. Henceforth, all

girls had to study home economics and the boys had to take technical studies.

THE UNITED NATIONS' POSITIVE INFLUENCE
Some foolish people think the world would be better off without the United Nations. Without the UN, we would not have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and, most importantly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw). Cedaw was adopted in 1979 and came into force in 1981. Singapore became a party to the Convention in 1995. Article 16 of Cedaw requires all state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family matters. What are the rights of women protected by Cedaw? First, the right to freely and consensually choose her spouse. Second, to have personal rights to her children even in the event of divorce. Third, the right of a married woman to choose

a profession or occupation. Fourth, to have property rights within marriage. Before leaving the subject of the UN, I would like to acknowledge the important contributions which a Singaporean, Dr Noeleen Heyzer, the former executive director of the UN Development Fund for Women, has made. In 2000, Dr Heyzer succeeded in persuading the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 1325. The resolution calls on states to safeguard the rights of women and girls in armed conflict. Judge Navanethem Pillay of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda said: "From time immemorial, rape has been regarded as one of the spoils of war. Now it is a war crime. We want to send out a strong message that rape is no longer a trophy of war."

STATUS OF WOMEN IN SINGAPORE
Have Singapore women succeeded in achieving justice and equality with men? I think it would be fair to say that in most important respects, women have achieved equality with men. Our women have achieved parity with men in education at all levels. Women's participation in our workforce is at about 60 per cent but there is still a wage gap between men and women. Women outlive men. Most glass ceilings impeding the rise of women in Singapore have been broken. We have a woman as our President. We have several very capable woman ministers, permanent secretaries, judges of the Supreme Court, CEOs of statutory boards and leading corporations. The only two areas which need improvement are the number of women in Parliament and the under-representation of women on corporate boards and in senior decision-making positions. The world has recognised the tremendous progress which women in Singapore have achieved in the past 50 years. In 2016, the UN Human Development Report ranked Singapore No. 11 out of 159 countries on its Gender Inequality Index. In 2017, the US News and World Report published a list of the 23 best countries in the world for a woman to live in. Singapore was ranked No. 22.

CONCLUSION
Women's quest for justice and equality has made tremendous progress in the past few decades. In Singapore, women have largely achieved parity with men. The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations and the Association of Women for Action and Research should be acknowledged for their pivotal role in fighting for equal rights. Singapore has become one of the world's most women-friendly countries. However, women in some other parts of the world are not so fortunate. They are still treated as second-class citizens and continue to live under the oppression of men. The struggle is not over.

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- Professor Tommy Koh, a veteran diplomat, is chairman of the Centre for International Law and rector of Tembusu College, both at the National University of Singapore.

Sino-Aussie ties: Still walking the thinning tightrope

William Choong

For The Straits Times

Australian Defence Minister Christopher Pyne is a pocket of energy when he speaks. Addressing delegates at the 2019 Fullerton Forum last month, he kept his audience enthralled, detailing Canberra's plans for the South Pacific, its relations with Asean and a list of new equipment buys for the Australian military.

His disarming yet engaging style has not escaped the attention of news hacks Down Under. There is a YouTube channel titled Pyne Watch, satirising how the minister whistles to himself before press briefings. He is portrayed as "The Fixer" who gets things done.

Writing in these pages recently, however, Professor Hugh White casts "The Fixer" in a different light. Mr Pyne was said to have gone silent, making only a "single perfunctory mention of Australia's alliance with America, and no specific mention at all of an American leadership role in upholding the Asian regional order or managing the tensions and dangers that arise from its escalating rivalry with China".

Mr Pyne's omission of America's leading role in his speech was significant, he wrote, because it stood in stark contrast to a 2017 address by then Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who urged the US to play a greater role in the region

and offered fulsome support for the liberal rules-based order it upholds.

Is it the case then that Canberra is having second thoughts, putting a distance between its long-time ally amid changing geopolitical dynamics in the region, with China on the rise and the Trump-induced upheavals in Washington?

Not quite. It should be noted that in his speech, Mr Pyne welcomed Washington's "importance and presence" in promoting the "norms and principles that have underpinned" the region's prosperity and security.

Canberra, he added, was "strengthening existing partnerships, most importantly our Alliance with the United States".

During the question-and-answer session, Mr Pyne welcomed the engagement of the US in the Indo-Pacific and stressed the reintroduction of the so-called "Quad" of democracies comprising Australia, Japan, India and the US – seen as a mechanism to peg back the challenge posed by China.

Prof White says that even Canberra's most devoted loyalists to the US alliance must ask themselves whether simply backing America is a viable option for navigating the troubled times ahead.

DOUBLE HEDGE

His framing of the question is spot on, but the reality is more complicated. It is not an "either-or" choice between China and the US.

Caught between China and the US, regional countries – including Australia – have sought to avoid

stark choices. Essentially, they have carried out a double hedge. They hedge against China's rise by seeking American guarantees. But they also hedge against American decline or withdrawal by seeking Chinese economic opportunities.

Mr Pyne outlined this clearly in the question-and-answer segment, when he highlighted Australia's role as being able to talk to both China and the US "openly and frankly".

He added: "We regard the US as our closest ally in the world, but we don't believe we need to choose between security (US) and prosperity (China)... Sovereignty and prosperity don't need to be linked in terms of their relationship with the great powers in the region."

The double hedge, denial of choice approach is evident in Australia's relations with China.

While Canberra is a staunch US military ally, it has participated in China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Yet, Canberra has not shied away from taking a principled approach towards China.

In fact, 2018 was not exactly a very good year for Sino-Australian relations. Last year, Canberra passed legislation to limit the influence of foreign actors in domestic affairs, this led to Chinese-Australian tycoon Huang Xiangmo being stripped of his permanent residency recently.

Last April, Australian warships were challenged by Chinese warships in the South China Sea. Mr Pyne's outlining of Canberra's A\$2 billion (S\$1.94 billion) Pacific Maritime Security Programme in



Australian Defence Minister Christopher Pyne sees Australia's role as being able to talk to both China and US "openly and frankly". PHOTO: DPA

the South Pacific, and US-Australia plans to redevelop the Lombrum naval base in Papua New Guinea, are seen as not-so-discreet pushback against Chinese influence in that region.

The Australian approach is not unique. Singapore, a major security partner of the US, upgraded its free trade agreement with China in November and is China's top destination for BRI investments. Yet, Singapore has not shied away from singling China out. Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue last year, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said that China's activities in the South China Sea had deviated from global norms.

The same applies to Japan, which has sought to work with China on regional infrastructure projects. Yet Tokyo has sought to use its "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy to seek to manage China's rise.

THE QUAD

The Indo-Pacific strategy being proffered by the "Quad" countries of Australia, Japan, India and the US calls on the region to support high principles such as free and open sea lanes, maritime security, and support for international law.

During the question-and-answer session, Mr Pyne spoke about how

NOT CHOOSING SIDES

We regard the US as our closest ally in the world, but we don't believe we need to choose between security (US) and prosperity (China)... Sovereignty and prosperity don't need to be linked in terms of their relationship with the great powers in the region.



AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE MINISTER CHRISTOPHER PYNE, on how the country sees its ties with US and China.

he saw the re-formation of the Quad. He said: "(It is) not aimed at any country but simply because we have shared interests. We are four democracies, and we believe in the expansion of the international rules-based order".

The "rules-based order" has been flagged by various analysts as code for US-led regional primacy. Seen in that context, Mr Pyne's exposition on the Quad sends the message that America continues to have a vital regional role in

managing the rise of China.

There is no doubt that countries in the Asia-Pacific fret about America's decline or withdrawal. There is also no doubt that regional countries have to engage China. But this is not yet the time to make stark choices.

THUCYDIDES TRAP

If anything, the so-called Thucydides Trap clash between rising power China and resident power America is not inevitable.

In an extensive takedown of the concept, historian Arthur Waldron notes that no such "trap" exists in the Greek text of the History of the Peloponnesian War. America did not strike out at rising Japan in 1941; neither did France, Russia and England against Germany in the 1930s. Professor Waldron argues that it's "far more likely" that there will be no "destined" war between China and America.

Granted, regional countries cannot have their cake and eat it. At some point, there might be a reckoning, particularly given the Trump administration's confrontational approach towards China.

US allies such as Australia would again have to make hard choices as and when tensions in the Taiwan Strait escalate (In 2004, Australia said that Canberra's alliance with the US did not apply to Taiwan).

Australia has also in the past embedded a naval ship with the US Seventh Fleet in Fukuoka. This could mean that it could be drawn into hostilities if the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands escalates.

A US Navy admiral once distilled the conundrum beautifully – in not choosing sides, regional countries are walking a tightrope between China and the US that has become thinner.

Is it decision time then?

To borrow the words of Sir Humphrey Appleby, the wily mandarin in the storied Yes Prime Minister satire: Ideas about making stark choices will be taken up "at the appropriate juncture, in due course, in the fullness of time".

• William Choong is a Shangri-La Dialogue senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



Indian soldiers examining the debris last Thursday after an attack in south Kashmir's Pulwama district. Jaish-e-Mohammed, an extremist group that pioneered suicide bombings in Kashmir, claimed responsibility for the attack. PHOTO: REUTERS

Kashmir tragedy has many authors

Mihir Sharma

Millions of Indians will by now have seen the twisted wreckage of buses carrying dozens of Indian paramilitary soldiers from the Central Reserve Police Force; at least 44 of them died when a car loaded with explosives rammed into their convoy as it passed through Pulwama district of India's Jammu and Kashmir state.

Jaish-e-Mohammed, a group of militant Islamic extremists who pioneered suicide bombings in the disputed region of Kashmir, claimed responsibility for the attack.

As one Kashmiri politician wrote on Twitter, it was "reminiscent of the dark days of militancy pre 2004-05".

Jaish-e-Mohammed is based in

Pakistan. Its leader Masood Azhar gives speeches freely and the group has built a sprawling training complex in the city of Bahawalpur, which features a wall painting of suitably militant-looking horses bearing down on Delhi's Red Fort.

Periodically, the Pakistani government pretends to crack down on militant Islamists such as Azhar; in fact, the terrorists continue to raise funds, recruit and strike at will across Pakistan's borders.

Nor is it just India that suffers. The Afghan government tells all and sundry that it cannot defeat the Taliban as long as the militants are supported by Pakistan.

Just a day before the Kashmir attack, the Pakistan-based Sunni extremist group Jaish al Adl killed 27 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, also using a car bomb.

Pakistani officials often like to

say that their country is among the foremost victims of Islamist terrorism. Perhaps.

But their response has been, at best, to accommodate extremism, and at worst, to try and convince terrorists that their efforts are best turned outwards, towards India, Afghanistan or Iran.

Indian government officials – like the Afghans – are caught in a bind. They have little leverage over the militants' patrons within the Pakistani military establishment.

Nor are the Americans any longer influential enough to help: Jaish-e-Mohammed went quiet in the mid-2000s at American insistence but re-emerged soon enough.

The Pakistani military has found a new patron: the People's Republic of China. Beijing has repeatedly blocked attempts by India at the United Nations to declare Azhar a

"global terrorist", freeze his assets and prevent him from travelling.

Nobody can quite understand why the same country that runs prison camps for ordinary Muslims in Xinjiang is protecting a self-confessed militant. Earlier, only the generals in Rawalpindi were held responsible for attacks such as this one in India. Today, Beijing's leaders will have to accept their share of the blame.

The India of the past would grit its teeth and absorb a blow like this. But Indian public opinion is no longer as patient as it was during the attack on Parliament in 2002 or the siege of Mumbai in 2008.

The big box-office success of the past year in India has been a dramatisation of the cross-border strikes on militant camps in Pakistani Kashmir launched in retaliation for a similar (albeit less

bloody) Jaish-e-Mohammed attack a few years ago.

India's ruling party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, won state elections following those strikes and it has adopted the movie's catchphrase as its own.

Mr Modi faces re-election in a few months; he will be under tremendous pressure to respond as he did then.

Yet Mr Modi's government has a lot of introspection to do as well.

The militants released a video of the man driving the explosive-laden car: He was a local, from Gundibagh village in Pulwama.

In the decade before Mr Modi took office in 2014, home-grown Islamist militancy in Kashmir had largely died out. In the past five years, it has tragically come roaring back, fed by a series of cynical moves by the government in New Delhi meant to shore up its popularity in the rest of India.

Mr Modi's colleagues in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have tried to paint other Indian politicians as being sympathetic to terrorists.

The BJP formed an opportunistic

alliance in order to enter Jammu and Kashmir's state government for the first time, and then abandoned that alliance in a manner that further alienated Kashmiris from Indian democracy.

Party supporters own television channels that regularly paint all Kashmiris, not just terrorists, as the enemy. Crowd-control tactics in Kashmir have become ever more brutal, angering locals.

And anyone who speaks up for the basic rights of Kashmiris under India's liberal Constitution is considered, in a delightful Indian neologism, "anti-national".

In the process, a once-quietest Kashmir has been set alight once again.

It is possible that Pakistan may want to stir up trouble in Kashmir. But, if it succeeds, then it is New Delhi that will have failed.

India's prime ministers, of every ideology and party, have long sought to control anger in Kashmir and, in the long term, win the state back to the Indian mainstream.

Mr Modi abandoned that policy, making his successors' task infinitely harder. BLOOMBERG



Visitors lining up to enter the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi. Vietnam is America's best "poster-child" of how a former enemy can be an economic success story, without having to suffer a regime change, and enhance its strategic independence. The Vietnamese government has also not been shy about its willingness to play its part in the peace process. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Trump-Kim summit

Vietnam as both host and role model for North Korea

Huong Le Thu

For The Straits Times

“North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, will become a great Economic Powerhouse,” United States President Donald Trump tweeted recently on his upcoming summit with the North Korean leader.

While Mr Trump is well known by now for his fondness for superlatives, his tweet about North Korea’s prospects as an economic “powerhouse” and economic “rocket” is significant when paired with the choice of Vietnam as the venue for the summit.

In essence, Vietnam is being used as a signpost to what is possible for North Korea by virtue of its history, geography and economic prospects.

Political similarities, including being on the periphery of China and a common determination to unify their nations under the ideology they chose – communism – and a shared enemy – the US – made Vietnam and North Korea close allies in the 1950s and early 60s.

The two cooperated in a “rice-for-weapon” scheme, which had North Korea sending artillery to Vietnam in exchange for rice.

But the paths they chose in the wake of geopolitical transformations during and after the Cold War have resulted in

substantial differences between the two today.

The fraternal solidarity between the then North Vietnam and North Korea was first tested by the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.

In the late 70s, the estrangement grew wider still. Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978. North Korea, as a result of its siding with the People’s Republic of China, supported the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom Penh.

The end of the Cold War set the course of the two nations further apart as differences grew in their political outlooks, strategic choices, regime preservation approaches and economic policies.

Specifically, Vietnam surged ahead of North Korea economically

following the launch of its “doi moi” free market reforms in the late 1980s. Vietnam is now a fast-growing economy that is attracting a steady flow of foreign direct investment, but with the party still retaining tight political control.

Ahead of the Feb 27-28 summit, Mr Trump’s approach seems to have shifted from the old tack of applying maximum pressure via sanctions to get Pyongyang to agree to complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation. Now, Washington is also dangling the possibility of a brighter economic future to persuade North Korea to change course.

Central to this new approach is Vietnam. It is America’s best

“poster-child” of how a former enemy can be an economic success story, without having to suffer a regime change, and in fact enhance its strategic independence.

Vietnam’s growing trade and investment links with countries such as the US, Japan and South Korea has meant that it is less reliant on China, something that Pyongyang, which is greatly dependent on Beijing for aid and trade, cannot fail to notice.

The Vietnamese government has not been shy about its willingness to play its part in the peace process and had, in fact, offered to play host even before the first summit took place in Singapore.

The idea about serving as a “role model” is not a new one for Hanoi.

It has been the subject of discussions with the North Korean leadership decades prior to the recent summitry.

But it was after Mr Kim came to power that things really got going. He laid down a “new strategic line” that emphasised economic development, rather than just military strength. In 2012, in his first year in power, he sent a delegation to Vietnam to learn more about its experience with reforms and market-oriented socialism. Mr Kim was reportedly impressed by Vietnamese economic performance, in particular, agricultural production in Thai Binh province.

To be sure, there are national differences that will make it difficult for Pyongyang to adopt wholesale doi moi-style reforms.

Notably, for the then newly unified Vietnam, economic engagement with the more prosperous and capitalist South was critical for its eventual success; the political situation is different on the Korean peninsula. Vietnam-style economic integration is not possible as there is no unification on the horizon. But the enthusiasm of South Korea’s Moon Jae-In to boost ties with the North will be a great asset to Mr Kim’s efforts at economic reforms.

WHAT HANOI STANDS TO GAIN

The hosting of the summit is important for Hanoi on several counts. The summit offers an international showcase for the success of its doi moi reforms in transforming the country which, in turn, boosts the prestige and legitimacy of its ruling party and government.

Hosting the summit also opens a new chapter in its history – Vietnam will no longer be a country whose name is synonymous with a bloody war with the US, but will be seen as a capable diplomatic actor and a contributor to world peace.

The Vietnamese government sees not just symbolic value from hosting the summit, but also considerable potential diplomatic gains as well, particularly if it resulted in a “Hanoi Peace Declaration” ending the Korean War.

Such an outcome would stamp Vietnam’s place in history and allow it to play a greater role in future diplomatic endeavours for having successfully convened and acted as an intermediary in these landmark negotiations.

On a bilateral level, there is also much in it for Hanoi. Being a good host for the summit will help it score points with the US – Vietnam’s largest export market and perhaps even ease pressure from Mr Trump’s demands for it to reduce its trade surplus with the US. A successful summit will also gain goodwill with South Korea, Vietnam’s largest investor and one of its leading aid donors and source of tourism.

Finally, if all goes well, it will foster closer ties between Hanoi and Pyongyang, which may result in better access to the North Korea’s market – when Mr Kim decides to open it.

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• Dr Huong Le Thu is a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Donald Trump’s ill-timed rift with Europe

Opportunities for an alliance on issues on big tech and data flows may be scuttled by tariff war on cars

Rana Foroohar

US President Donald Trump may be about to fight the wrong trade war – again.

Even as Mr Trump claims to be making real progress with trade negotiations in China, the commerce department is set to give him confidential recommendations on his Section 232 auto investigations, which could allow him to use national security as cover for new tariffs on foreign vehicles.

Mr Trump has 90 days to act on them, but many insiders believe there’s a good chance he will act sooner than that and launch auto tariffs on the EU and Japan.

It is hard to overstate what a disaster this would be. Mr Trump is touting a “breakthrough” on China trade because he wants to be seen as a “dealmaker”. But this is an unconvincing feint – the tensions between the United States and China are big, existential, and will last for decades. He has reason to take the economic heat off both countries: China’s slowdown has hit US companies including Apple.

Meanwhile, Mr Trump may be about to use steel and cars as an

awkward way to stumble into a free trade agreement negotiation with Europe, possibly to try to get rid of longstanding transatlantic trade issues, such as EU agricultural subsidies, which he sees as “unfair”.

While there is never a good time for a trade war with allies, this timing is particularly bad.

Europe has its subsidies and industrial favourites, as does the US. But there is actually a huge opportunity at this moment for a new transatlantic alliance in a number of areas that would benefit both the US and the European Union – particularly in relation to China, which is the real existential threat to the global trading system.

Take the car industry of the future.

While Mr Trump wants to slap tariffs on old-line cars and trucks, the auto industry in both America and Europe is desperate to create common 5G standards for smart cars, and an autonomous vehicle industry that can compete with either Google or Waymo’s efforts.

That will almost certainly require an industry-wide global partnership to be established between the US, the EU and Japan, since no single producer can go it alone.

While Mr Trump is making such



US President Donald Trump may soon start a trade war with EU and Japan over car imports, but it will be a disaster, the writer says. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

an alliance harder, China moves ahead in the race to set standards.

Then there is the common ground on Big Tech.

There is plenty of evidence that private and public interests on both sides of the Atlantic are desperate to create clear, common rules.

This includes the German Facebook ruling which links privacy and competition in ways that are of interest to US regulators,

and the state of California’s calls for “data dividends” in which people get paid by big technology companies for their personal data.

Multinational companies supporting Europe’s General Data Protection Regulation have called for a US version of the same.

A common rule book would be a huge boon for industry in both regions.

While trade in traditional goods

and services has been flat for several years now, cross-border data flows grew a whopping 148 fold from 2005 to 2017, according to a new McKinsey Global Institute Analysis.

Amazingly, the only World Trade Organisation rules governing data flows are for financial services.

That is one reason why Australia and Japan are pushing negotiations to create some cross-border rules. This offers yet another opportunity for the US and Europe (both of which are involved in the negotiations) alongside many other liberal democracies, to set the ground rules for the digital age.

The alternative is allowing China’s own brand of surveillance state capitalism to gain ground.

There are, of course, legitimate points of trade tension between the US and Europe. But there is so much more common ground, particularly when compared to China.

I recently spoke to a French diplomat who was preparing a list of ways in which he felt that the US and Europe were actually converging.

This was part of an effort to convince both his own government and the EU bureaucracy in Brussels that they should ignore Mr Trump’s

boorishness and be open to the benefits of joining forces with the US to control the high-growth markets of the future before China claims them.

Among the items on the list was increasing support among US politicians and the public for the idea of a Green New Deal to cut the country’s greenhouse gas emissions and create jobs.

Staffers to newly elected Democrat congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the deal’s most prominent advocate, have met Germany’s resurgent Green party politicians to discuss common ground.

Then there are the moves towards Big Tech regulation and digital taxation (both the US and the EU want to find a better way to tax intangibles).

Even in healthcare, typically a point of transatlantic difference, there is growing common ground.

Americans said it was the most important voting issue in last year’s midterm elections and young people in the US realise that some EU countries have designed health systems that are both better, and cheaper.

As polarised as the US and Europe seem, you can make a case that this is actually as good a moment as we have had in years to forge a new transatlantic alliance.

But it is likely that Mr Trump is going to bungle it by turning a trade war that has been limited to China and the US into one that includes the world’s three major regions. And as we know, manages a tris rarely end well. FINANCIAL TIMES

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 34 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 48 to 54 (Moderate)



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Rat race on the canal

Thousands of people from all over the world visited Venice at the weekend as the Italian city kicked off its carnival season with the traditional opening water parade on the Cannaregio Canal.

On Sunday, this giant rat led a regatta of decorated boats, many of

which had been converted into huge models of birds and animals, on the Grand Canal near the Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute.

This year's Venice Carnival, a public party lasting for about two weeks leading up to the Roman Catholic period of Lent, started on Saturday

and will culminate on Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, on March 5.

"Blame the moon" is the theme of this year's parade, a spokesman said, to mark 50 years since man first walked on the moon, and in reference to Shakespeare's play Othello, where the moon is blamed for

driving men mad.

The Venice Carnival tradition dates back centuries and is famous for the stylised masks donned by revellers strolling through the city.

In recent decades, the event has become a major tourist attraction for the city.

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MARGARET YEO
CAREGIVER CAN LOOK FORWARD TO
NIGHT RESPITE SERVICE AT CARE HOMES B2

S'pore navy launches first of its four new submarines

Timely move to acquire new subs with more firepower, combat options as maritime security challenges evolve: Ng Eng Hen

Lim Min Zhang
In Kiel (Germany)

Singapore's acquisition of new submarines which offer more firepower and combat options is a timely move as maritime security challenges evolve and countries beef up their submarine fleets, said Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen.

Speaking yesterday at the launch of the first Type 218SG submarine named Invincible, Dr Ng said Singapore faces threats in the maritime domain, including terrorism, the shipping of illegal arms, weapons of mass destruction and people, as well as piracy.

He noted that in Asia, defence spending has risen significantly, hitting US\$447 billion (S\$606 billion) in 2017, a jump of about 61 per cent from 2008, with many countries modernising their armed forces.

Citing countries such as China, Indonesia, Thailand, India and South Korea that are planning to expand their submarine fleets, Dr Ng added: "In this context, the acquisition of the new Type 218SG submarines is timely."

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Ng also pointed out that Singapore sits astride two of the busiest sea lines of communication in the world – the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca – through which about one-third of the world's maritime trade is transported.

Referring to the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN), he said: "So I think most people will receive this development by the RSN with assurance that it is able to do its part in keeping our sea lines of communication open not only for Singapore but the world."

The new submarine will have 50 per cent longer endurance, more firepower, more capable sensors and advanced automation compared to the current RSN fleet of submarines. It will undergo sea trials in Germany before it is delivered to Singapore in 2021. It is the first of four Type 218SG submarines slated to replace the four refurbished Challenger- and Archer-class submarines that the RSN has operated for more than two decades.

The new submarines are customised for Singapore's operating environment, particularly the shallow and busy waters in the region, and are sold to no other country.

The launch of the diesel-electric submarine meant that it has been built but is not yet operational.

The RSN, the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA) and German defence contractor thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) worked together on the design and building of the submarine.

Dr Ng called the launch – held at TKMS' shipyard in port city Kiel, about 90km from Hamburg in northern Germany – a "significant milestone" for the RSN and Singapore and hailed the new submarines as a testament to RSN's continual growth and progress. "We got here not in a single jump,

FORMING THE BASELINE

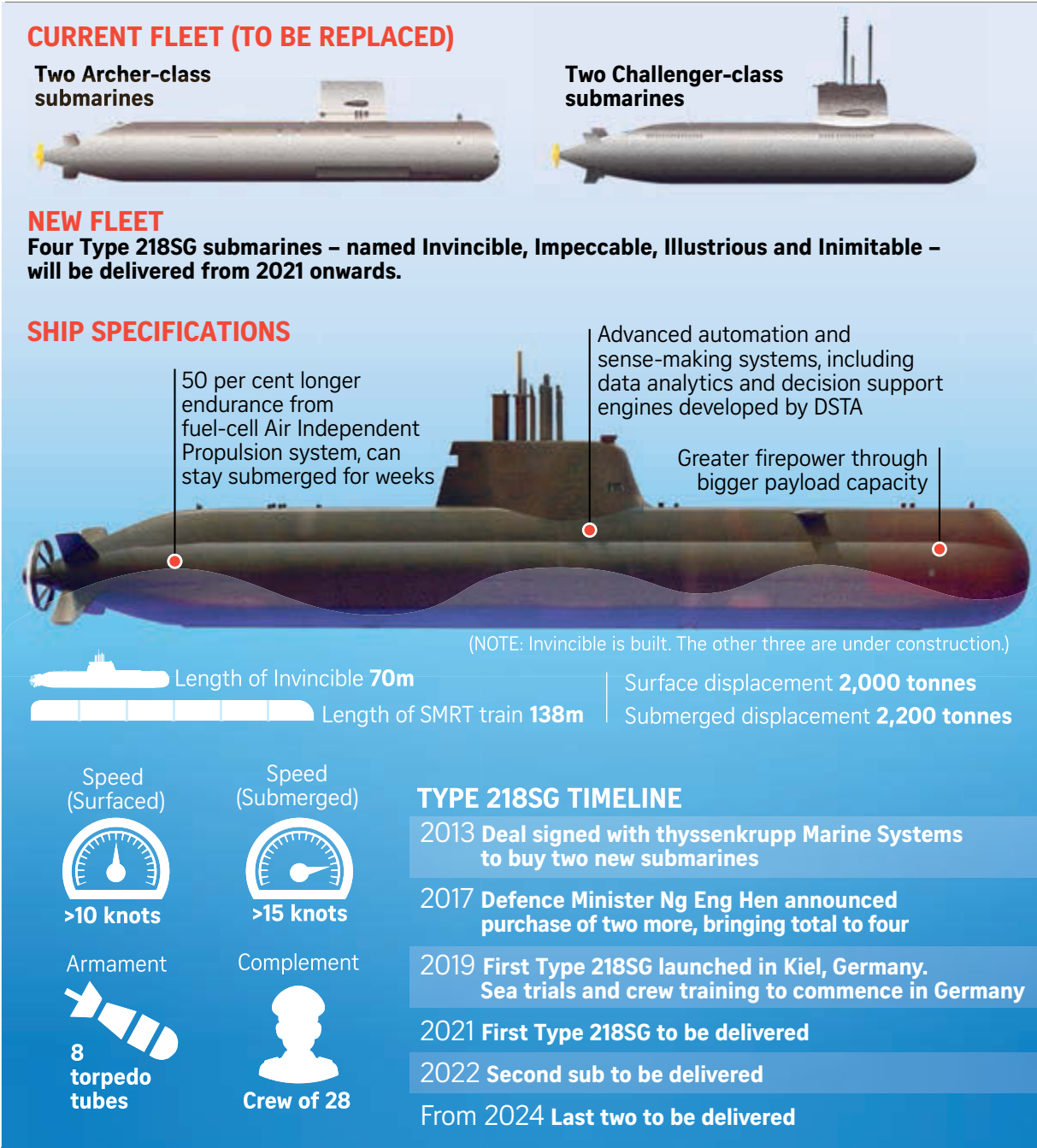
As the first boat, the things we set in place will form the baseline. For us, when we pick the route we're going to go on, we will be very careful what direction we set, because we must be pushing boundaries.



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL JONATHAN LIM
(left), commanding officer of Invincible. The crew, coming from RSN's existing submarines, have been selected and training involving extended periods in Germany will start in a few months.

New sub packs greater firepower

The Republic of Singapore Navy's first newly-built submarine will be able to stay submerged longer, have greater firepower, and more capable sensors. Named Invincible, it will be the first of four Type 218SG submarines customised for Singapore's needs.



but because we persisted," he said.

Dr Ng's wife, Professor Ivy Ng, group chief executive of SingHealth, yesterday launched the submarine at a ceremony attended by the Chief of German Navy, Vice-Admiral Andreas Krause; RSN's Chief of Navy, Rear-Admiral Lew Chuen Hong, and senior defence officials from both countries.

Dr Ng also announced the names of the other new submarines – Impeccable, Illustrious and Inimitable – which are under construction and will be delivered from 2022.

He officiated at the launch yesterday

after attending the Munich Security Conference over the weekend, where he met defence counterparts on the sidelines, such as Acting United States Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan.

Colonel Teo Chin Leong, commanding officer of 171 Squadron, which consists of the RSN's fleet of submarines, said the Type 218SG was the most advanced submarine that TKMS has built so far. "It's a bigger boat, but we kept to a crew of 28, which is what we use to operate our current classes. To us, that is already significant," he said.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jonathan Lim, commanding officer of Invincible, said his crew, coming from RSN's existing submarines, have been selected and training involving extended periods in Germany will start in a few months.

"As the first boat, the things we set in place will form the baseline. For us, when we pick the route we're going to go on, we will be very careful what direction we set, because we must be pushing boundaries," he added.

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Defence Science and Technology Agency's director of naval systems Ong Li Koon said the new Type 218SG submarines can be customised more extensively. PHOTO: MINDEF

Customisable submarines built for S'pore needs

Starting on a clean slate has allowed Singapore to customise the new Type 218SG submarines more extensively, compared with what it could do with second-hand submarines.

Some of the customisations include using materials that are more suited to the saltier Singapore waters, including more automation that affords crew members more rest, and incorporating design elements that are tailored to the average Singaporean sailor's body size and strength.

Mr Ong Li Koon, director of naval systems at the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA), revealed these features when he spoke to reporters yesterday before the launch of the new Type 218SG submarine in the port city of Kiel, Germany.

At the event, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen's wife, Professor Ivy Ng, launched Invincible, which is the first of four Type 218SG submarines purchased by Singapore to be delivered from 2021.

Mr Ong, 43, said the experience with the Republic of Singapore Navy's (RSN) latest submarines – known as the Invincible-class – contrasted markedly with its four existing Swedish submarines.

Between 1995 and 1997, the RSN acquired four Sjöormen-class submarines from Sweden which were built in the 1960s. In 2005, Singapore bought and upgraded a pair of Swedish Västergötland-class submarines, which are called Archer-class vessels.

"For the Swedish submarines, it was more like taking an existing submarine and trying to customise it to our needs. Now, we have a clean sheet, we take an existing design but customise it. We can do a lot more if we want," said Mr Ong, who was director for the Type 218SG submarine programme before taking up his current role last September.

DSTA, RSN and German defence contractor thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) worked together on the design and development of the Type 218SG. Before the launch ceremony, DSTA and TKMS, the manufacturer of the Type 218SG submarines, signed an agreement to collaborate on new technologies such as additive manufacturing and data analytics for naval applications.

The memorandum of understanding allows both parties to work together on the design, engineering, and qualification of additive manufactured components, such as submarine spare parts, which could be tested and trialled on Singapore submarines.

Military Expert 3 Simon Oh, 42, who is coxswain of Invincible, said the RSN's current fleet requires watch keepers in three different locations – for the combat, engineering and weapon functions.

"With this new boat, we are able to co-locate them. This will facilitate better communication and faster decision-making," added the coxswain, who is the most experienced sailor on a ship, responsible for discipline and welfare.

Lim Min Zhang



The Invincible was launched yesterday at German defence contractor thyssenkrupp Marine Systems' shipyard in port city Kiel in north Germany. The Type 218SG submarine is customised for Singapore's operating environment, particularly the shallow and busy waters in the region. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Caregiver looks forward to night respite service

Pilot scheme will be big help, says dialysis patient who is often woken up at night by dementia-stricken mother

Vanessa Liu

Retiree Margaret Yeo is used to being woken up by her mother in the middle of the night.

The 92-year-old dementia sufferer would often ask her daughter – and carer for several decades – what they are doing the next day and what time they need to get up.

“Initially, I answered her questions,” said Madam Yeo, 71, a former administrative officer. “After a while, I would just tell her, ‘It’s one o’clock now – time to sleep.’”

Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong announced last Wednesday that the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) will pilot a new night respite service at care homes for seniors with dementia who suffer from sleep and behavioural issues.

Although many details about the programme are still to be revealed, the initiative will see them take part in cognitive activities such as arts and craft and simple puzzles at night to help manage their behavioural and sleep issues, while their caregivers catch up on sleep.

The pilot is expected to start in the second half of this year.

“Caregiving can take its toll,” Mr Tong told Parliament, adding that carers often suffer from a lack of sleep.

Madam Yeo shares a room with her mother, Madam Ng Guan Cheng, in her three-bedroom flat in Marine Parade, where they live with Madam Yeo’s husband and her 40-year-old son.

Caring for her mother has become tougher since the older woman developed dementia. Madam Ng needs help with bathing and often requires a wheelchair to get around.

“Because of dementia, she sleeps very little,” said Madam Yeo. “She also forgets the things she has done, or whom she has met. Immediately after a meal, she can’t remember what she ate. Sometimes, she refuses to eat and we have to force her to eat.”

Madam Yeo is afraid of leaving her mother alone in case she falls.

“Sometimes we see bruises on her, or she tells us that she hurt herself. But she cannot recall where she fell or what happened. That’s why somebody must always be around.”

Madam Yeo also has to contend with her own dialysis sessions, which last four hours, three times a week – after which caring for her mother can be even more trying.

Madam Ng goes to a day care centre from 8am to 4pm on weekdays, where she takes part in simple exercises. But the centre does not operate at night.

Madam Yeo, who does not have space at home for a maid, believes the pilot scheme will be a big help, as long as the nursing home is nearby.

“If it’s too far from my place, it would defeat the purpose because it would be inconvenient,” she said.

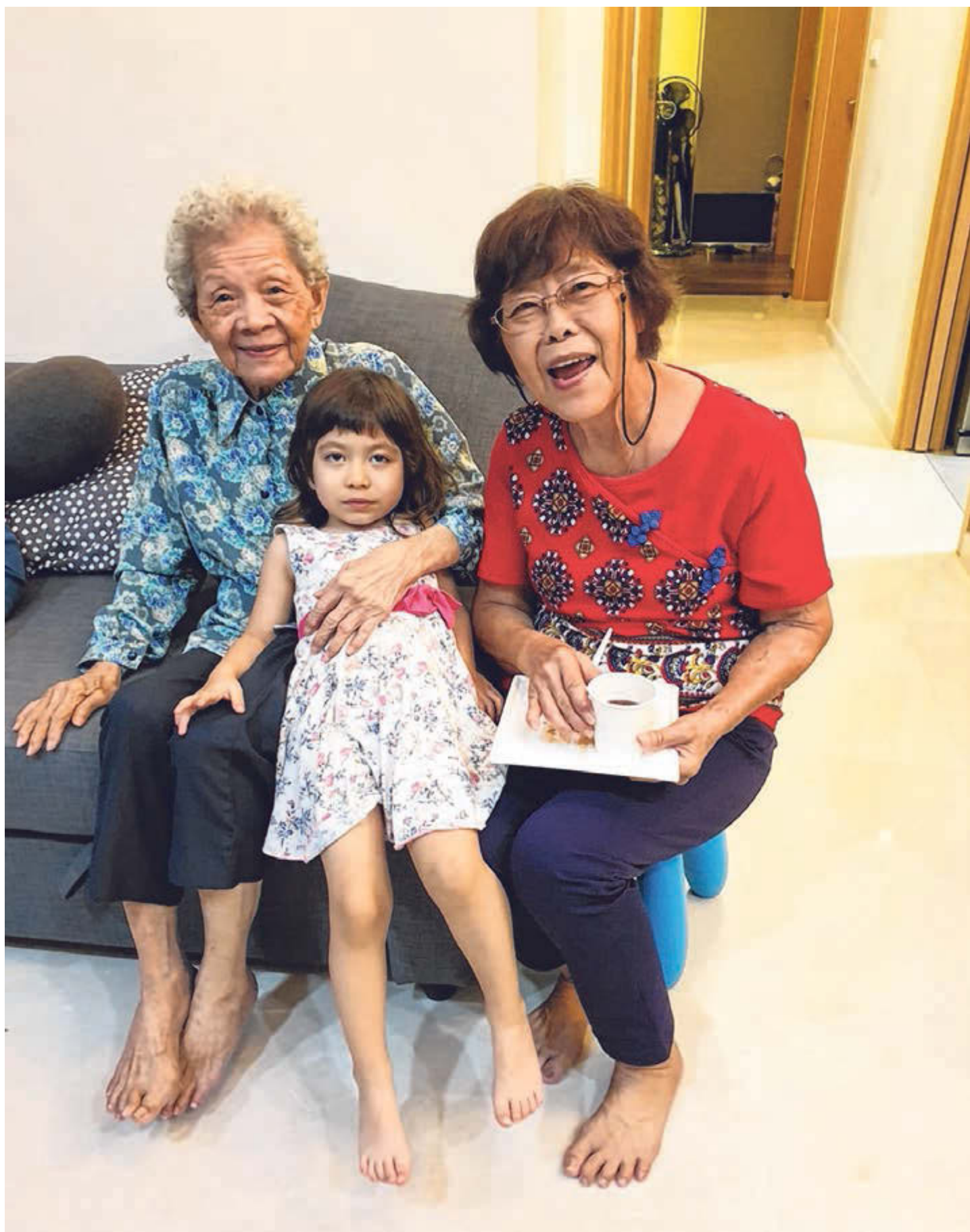
In addition to the night respite options, Mr Tong also said a new pre-enrolment system will allow caregivers who may need respite services to register their loved ones and complete some of the administrative processes in advance, so that less activation time is required when the time comes to use those services.

St Luke’s ElderCare will be one of the first healthcare providers to offer this programme, and aims to do so in the first quarter of this year.

Its chief executive, Dr Kenny Tan, said: “One of our aims is for enrolment turnaround time to be less than a week, when previously the process would be longer. With this service, we hope to introduce more flexibility as caregivers will be able to use the service on a more ad-hoc basis.”

Madam Yeo, who has heard of cases of caregivers who suffer from burnout, emphasises the importance of self-care for caregivers. She said: “In order to give proper care to your loved ones, you need to look after yourself first.”

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Madam Margaret Yeo with her mother, Madam Ng Guan Cheng, and her granddaughter, Alyx Raja Poh. Madam Yeo, who does not have space at home for a maid, believes the pilot scheme will be a big help, as long as the nursing home is nearby. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARGARET YEO

Although many details about the programme are still to be revealed, the initiative will see dementia sufferers take part in cognitive activities such as arts and craft and simple puzzles at night to help manage their behavioural and sleep issues, while their caregivers catch up on sleep. The pilot is expected to start in the second half of this year.

CARING HAS BECOME TOUGHER

Because of dementia, she sleeps very little. She also forgets the things she has done, or whom she has met. Immediately after a meal, she can’t remember what she ate. Sometimes, she refuses to eat and we have to force her to eat.



MADAM MARGARET YEO, on her mother, Madam Ng Guan Cheng, 92, who has dementia.

Grant will help ease burden, says retiree caring for partially paralysed wife

Since his wife had a stroke five years ago, Mr Tan Sue Hoai has been taking care of her daily – bathing her, preparing her meals, helping her to use the bathroom and carrying her to bed.

“This is me fulfilling my promise to her at our wedding – that when one of us has problems, the other takes care of him or her,” said the 73-year-old retiree, who has been married to Madam Oei Lian Eng for 30 years.

Mr Tan considered sending his wife to a nursing home after the stroke, which left her paralysed on her left side, but she wanted to live in their three-room Bedok flat.

These days, 66-year-old Madam Oei spends much of her weekdays

in a daycare centre nearby, where she does rehabilitation and spends time with other seniors through activities such as karaoke and games.

Mr Tan, who used to be a shop assistant for a joss paper business, retired 11 years ago. The couple have no children.

He uses his monthly Central Provident Fund payout of \$300, coupled with his savings, to pay for their combined monthly expenses of \$500 to \$600. These include fees for the daycare services, utilities, food and household essentials.

“We rarely go out. If there’s a function nearby – like a community centre dinner or a getai performance – I will wheel her there,” said Mr Tan, who added that transporting his

wife to places farther away can cost around \$100 for a round trip.

A new monthly Home Caregiving Grant of \$200 will be introduced by the end of this year to help defray the costs for those who opt to provide long-term care for their loved ones with permanent moderate disabilities at home or in care centres located within the community.

To qualify, the care recipients must require assistance with at least three activities of daily living – namely bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring such as from bed to chair, and moving from room to room – regardless of age.

The means-tested grant – the monthly household income per capita must not exceed \$2,600 – will

replace the existing Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) Grant of \$120 per month. In addition to offsetting the costs of hiring an FDW, caregivers can use the grant for other caregiving expenses, such as the costs of homecare services, and transportation to medical appointments.

Mr Tan said that although the new grant might help to relieve the couple’s financial burden a little, they will still not be able to afford a domestic helper.

“I’ll do everything myself while I still can,” he said. “I worry about the day I’m unable to take care of her. I worry about what might happen to her if I were to go first.”

Vanessa Liu



Madam Oei Lian Eng with her husband, Mr Tan Sue Hoai, who is her caregiver. She suffered a stroke which left her paralysed on her left side. ST FILE PHOTO



A wild boar seen near Block 544 Choa Chu Kang Street 52 yesterday. The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society said food left out in the open by people was a key reason for repeated sightings. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW

Wild boar spotted again in Choa Chu Kang

A wild boar was spotted roaming near Housing Board flats in Choa Chu Kang yesterday.

Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) deputy chief executive Anbarasi Boopal told The Straits Times that the wild boar had been spotted in the area in recent months.

Yesterday, it was seen near Block 544 Choa Chu Kang Street 52 around 7.30am.

Members of the public were seen keeping their distance from the animal.

Ms Anbarasi said that when Acres staff previously visited the area where the wild boar was spotted, they found that people had left food out in the open for animals.

She also said that “trash manage-

ment is improper” in the area. “It really boils down to the food available in the area,” Ms Anbarasi said, adding that it was a key reason for the repeated wild boar sightings.

The town council has been supportive of the efforts required to curb the problem of wild boar sightings, she said.

“However, there are still residents who leave food around, attracting the pig. We need more awareness that feeding wildlife has negative effects on their behaviour, resulting in conflict between humans and animals,” she added.

“The feeding of pigs is an issue in other parts of Singapore as well,” Ms Anbarasi said, noting that Lorong Halus is another wild boar hot spot.

Acres advises the public to keep a safe distance from wild boars when they see them in open areas, and to avoid making sudden movements or noises if approached by the animals.

There have been several wild boar sightings in the last few months.

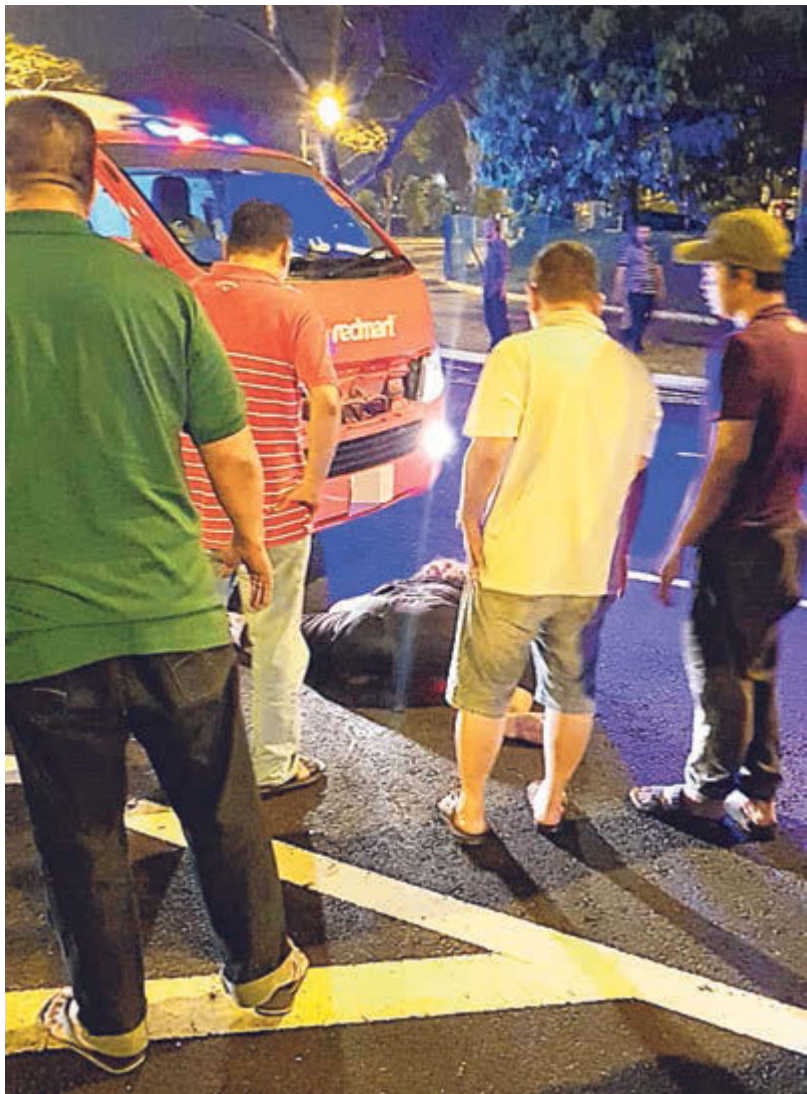
On Jan 12, a wild boar was killed in an accident with a lorry in Punggol outside Waterway Point. The animal had run out onto the road and was hit by the vehicle. It subsequently succumbed to its injuries.

Last July, a lone wild boar was also spotted in the same Choa Chu Kang HDB estate. The animal eventually left for a forested area near Choa Chu Kang Way.

Choo Yun Ting

Price evaluated only after quality of bids assessed; plots awarded for agriculture

A plot of land in Lim Chu Kang, in this picture taken in May 2017. Two plots of land at Lim Chu Kang were not awarded in the tender exercise as no proposals met the tender requirements. But bidders experienced more success in Sungei Tengah, where all three parcels of land up for tender were awarded.



Right: The van driver was said to be among those who helped free the woman rider.



The police are investigating.

Choo Yun Ting

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Chinese bike-sharing firm ofo's licence was suspended last week, and the firm is reported to have laid off its entire operations team without compensation last month. ST FILE PHOTO

Bike-sharing licensing fees cannot be used to pay debts

Fees cover regulatory costs, and deposits are for specific situations like settling fines

Zhaki Abdullah

Security deposits and licensing fees the Government collects from bike-sharing companies cannot be used to pay their debts to users and employees after their licences are revoked, said Senior Minister of State for Transport Lam Pin Min in Parliament yesterday.

The fees are to cover regulatory costs so that they are not passed on to taxpayers, while the deposits are for specific situations like settling unpaid fines, he added.

A licensing rule was introduced last year. At a cost of \$60 per bike – comprising a \$30 licence fee and a \$30 security deposit – Mobike had to pay \$1.5 million in fees for its fleet of 25,000 two-wheelers. The

licence is valid for two years.

The authorities, however, are “closely monitoring the situation” to see if more can be done to protect the employees and customers of such firms, a suggestion made by Nominated MP Walter Theseira.

Associate Professor Theseira had asked whether the Government considers – as part of the licensing process – whether a bike-sharing operator can meet its financial obligations to staff, vendors and users.

He had also asked whether any monies from fees paid to the Government are available for claims by these parties and, if so, how claims are determined.

Last week Chinese bike-sharing firm ofo's licence was suspended, for failing to meet regulations such as introducing a QR code-based

Dr Lam also said situations where the security deposit can be used are listed in the Parking Places Act, and these include serving as surety for an operator's compliance with licence conditions, and recovering the costs of removing and disposing of bicycles should the operator fail to do so after its licence is cancelled.

parking system that would allow its bicycles to be parked only within specified areas. The firm is reported to have laid off its entire operations team without compensation last month, and is also said to owe vendors more than \$700,000.

Dr Lam said vendors, companies, employees and users who are owed money by operators who lost their licences can seek redress through the civil courts. “The employees can also approach the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) for help to resolve their salary disputes,” he added.

Three ofo employees have filed claims with TADM since last December for the reimbursement of expenses, the Manpower Ministry told The Straits Times last month.

Dr Lam also said situations where the security deposit can be used are listed in the Parking Places Act, and these include serving as surety for an operator's compliance with licence conditions, and recovering

the costs of removing and disposing of bicycles should the operator fail to do so after its licence is cancelled.

He added that the Land Transport Authority (LTA) will not make a claim on the deposit should these circumstances not arise.

In March last year, it was announced that bike-sharing companies here would have to be licensed, as part of efforts to curb indiscriminate parking. Both oBike and Share-BikeSG later ceased operations, citing difficulty in complying with the new regime.

Last September, LTA gave six companies licences to operate here. Of these, three – Anywheel, SG Bike and Mobike – remain.

Last week, it was announced that two firms – Moov Mobility and Ywise Circle – have applied to operate bike-sharing services here, while Mobike and Anywheel have applied to expand their fleets.

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Planning more help for injured workers, disabled job seekers

Yuen Sin

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is studying ways to better support injured workers and help people with disabilities find work, Minister of State for Manpower Zaqq Mohamad said in Parliament yesterday.

It is considering making it compulsory for companies to report all work injuries that result in medical leave or the worker being given light duty, as part of a public consultation paper on amendments to the Work Injury Compensation Act that will be finalised in April, he said in response to Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC).

Currently, the law requires companies to report incidents to the ministry when workers are given more than three days of sick leave, or if they are hospitalised for at least 24 hours.

The proposed move is in line with the reporting criteria in other developed countries, like those in the European Union, said Mr Zaqq.

He also told Mr Ng that his ministry will study if doctors, rather than employers, should be the ones required to report such work injuries.

The Health Ministry will be consulted on this as well, he added.

The issue of inadequate leave for injured workers has come under the spotlight after orthopaedic surgeon Kevin Yip Man Hing appealed last month against his conviction by a Singapore Medical Council disciplinary tribunal for professional misconduct.

Dr Yip did not give any sick leave to a construction worker who had surgery for a broken collarbone and certified him fit for “light duties” on discharge.

The tribunal, which investigated the incident after a complaint by the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, suspended him for five months last year.

The worker had fallen from a height in July 2011, fracturing his collarbone and ribs, and injuring his wrist.

Giving an update on support for people with disabilities, Mr Zaqq said more than 1,600 people with disabilities have found jobs through various job-matching services and programmes in the past three years.

Still, the Government can do better to help them, he added.

His ministry hopes to get more enlightened employers to take advantage of hiring schemes that have been rolled out, like the Open Door Programme administered by SG Enable. The programme provides dedicated support to employers to hire and train people with disabilities.

He was replying to Nominated MP Anthea Ong, who said she was concerned about the reportedly small proportion – about 4.9 per cent – of disabled people who are employed.

Mr Zaqq said the MOM will release more comprehensive data on the employment and unemployment of people with disabilities later this year, as the reported figure in the media last week was based only on publicly available data.

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The MOM is considering making it compulsory for companies to report all work injuries that result in medical leave or the worker being given light duty, as part of a public consultation paper on amendments to the Work Injury Compensation Act... Minister of State for Manpower Zaqq Mohamad said in response to Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC).

ComCare aid: Important to look beyond statistics

Lester Wong

Between 14,000 and 16,000 households received ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance (SMTA) at any time between 2015 and 2017, said Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee in Parliament yesterday.

He was replying to Mr Louis Ng's (Nee Soon GRC) request for SMTA first-time applicant numbers over the last five years.

Mr Lee added that while five-year data was not available, about 25 per cent of households among those whose SMTA ended in 2016 reapplied and received it within 12 months. The median monthly assistance quantum that a household on SMTA received was about \$400, and the median duration of assistance in a year was about six months.

These figures exclude other forms of government assistance and subsidies that households could be receiving, such as Medifund for medical expenses, subsidised rental housing, financial assistance for school fees, or childcare subsidies.

ComCare is part of the multiple layers of assistance provided by the Government to support low-income individuals and families. Households that require help to tide over a period of financial difficulty are provided with ComCare (SMTA).

Depending on the needs of the household, the Ministry of Social and Family Development's social service offices may provide cash, help with household and medical bills, or refer people to agencies such as Workforce Singapore for job assistance or family services centres for further support.

“Beyond these statistics, it is important to understand the challenges families face in overcoming their issues, and the support that will help sustain their self-reliance,” said Mr Lee.

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There are programmes where mid-career entrants can earn a salary while being trained as pre-school teachers, Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee said. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Pre-school sector draws more mid-career entrants

Reflecting the Government's increased support for the pre-school sector, mid-career entrants enrolled in professional early childhood certificate or diploma courses have increased by more than 70 per cent over the last five years, Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee said yesterday.

He was responding to Non-Constituency MP Dennis Tan on what is being done to recruit more pre-school teachers to have a total of 20,000 by 2020, as well as to attract more men to the predominantly-female sector.

Singapore plans to have 40,000 new full-day pre-school places by 2023 – adding to 170,000 now.

There are about 18,000 early childhood educators currently and more than three-quarters of those joining the sector are mid-career entrants, Mr Lee said.

Less than 1 per cent of pre-school teachers are male.

Mr Lee noted that the National Institute of Early Childhood Development – established last May – plans to admit about 700 students into its inaugural diploma programme this year, which is double the total in-

700

Number of students the National Institute of Early Childhood Development will admit into its diploma programme this year.

18k

Current number of early childhood educators. Singapore aims to have a total of 20,000 by 2020.

take for such programmes in 2015.

The new Early Childhood Development and Education diploma replaces existing programmes at Nanyang Polytechnic and Temasek Polytechnic.

Potential mid-career entrants can also avail themselves of the Professional Conversion Programme and Place and Train Programme, under which they can earn a salary while undergoing on-the-job coaching and classroom-based teaching or training, said Mr Lee.

He added that mindsets have to be changed in order to attract more people to the pre-school sector.

“There are certain common misconceptions that an early childhood educator is a nanny or a caregiver rather than a teacher. There is also the mindset that women are more suited to the pre-school sector... But men can also equally play a role in that regard,” he said.

“So we launched a national campaign last year... to (help people) have a more accurate view.”

Lester Wong

Jail, fine for trio over fatal 2014 Geylang fire

First case of its kind in which deaths had occurred in an illegal workers' dormitory, prosecution says

Shaffiq Alkhatib

To maximise profit, a property owner and two men erected partitions in a Geylang apartment to create more rooms, converting the unit into an illegal foreign workers' dormitory – with fatal consequences.

Four Malaysian foreign workers who lived at the unit in Lorong 4 Geylang died of smoke inhalation after a fire broke out there on Dec 6, 2014.

Five other people living in the same three-storey building and two firefighters were injured in the blaze. According to earlier news reports, the incident was then Singapore's worst fire in 10 years.

Deputy Public Prosecutors (DPPs) Wong Kok Weng, Soh Weiqi and Jane Lim stated in their submissions that this was the first case of its kind in which deaths had occurred in an illegal workers' dormitory.

After an eight-day trial, property owner Chiang Teck Fung, 60, was sentenced yesterday to 10 months'

jail and a fine of \$50,000.

The other two men, Khah Tee Meng, 54, and Ong Kah Sim, 67, were each sentenced to a year and a month's jail. The pair were also fined \$60,000 each.

The three men were each convicted of two charges – an offence under the Fire Safety Act and another under the Planning Act involving the development of land without planning permission.

The DPPs added: "Such measures in the case of workers' dormitory would include fire alarms, sprinklers, fire extinguishers and adequate exits to be installed.

"Not only was this approval not obtained by any of the three accused persons, the partitions were made of combustible materials and their erection also affected the means of escape."

Court documents stated that Chiang invited Khah to take up the tenancy of the property in 2014. Khah and Ong then agreed to take part in a plan in which Khah was the official tenant. The DPPs' submissions stated: "The venture between Ong and Khah was that Ong would fi-



In the 2014 Geylang apartment blaze, four Malaysian foreign workers died of smoke inhalation. Five other people living in the same three-storey building (below) and two firefighters were injured. PHOTOS: IHSAN PRABAKARAN S/O SUBRAMANIAM.



nance the cost of renting the premises and the renovation works (as well as) source for tenants...

Khah would manage the housekeeping of the premises. Khah was also to receive a percentage of the prof-

its from the venture."

Chiang and Khah entered into a tenancy agreement in August that year. With Chiang's approval, Khah also erected partitions in the premises to increase the number of rooms from five to 10. Twenty-two foreign workers as well as two Singaporeans later moved into the property and a fire broke out in the wee hours of Dec 6 that year.

The Sunday Times had then reported that firefighters extinguished the flames within 30 minutes with two water jets.

Chiang, Khah and Ong are now out on bail of \$15,000 each and they must surrender themselves at the State Courts on March 4 to begin serving their sentences.

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Attire check incident sparks debate on school rule

Jolene Ang

The attire check incident at Nanyang Girls' High School (NYGH) that blew up last month has raised questions over whether the rule that bans coloured undergarments should be relooked.

Last month, Chinese-language paper Shin Min Daily News reported that a female teacher, believed to be the Secondary 4 year head, had unbuttoned students' uniforms to check the colour of their bra straps during the attire check.

A parent told the evening paper that the female teacher involved in the incident had been conducting the attire check on behalf of the male form teacher.

However, the teacher allegedly un-

did the collar buttons of students' uniforms and pulled out their bra straps during her checks.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, the Ministry of Education (MOE) said the NYGH incident was an "isolated case".

"Students' well-being is always our priority, and we will ensure that our schools remain nurturing learning places for all students," said Ms Liew Wei Li, MOE's director of schools.

Ms Liew said MOE provides schools with guidelines to manage school discipline but schools still formulate their own policies and rules "based on the school's context and student profile", adding that discipline in schools aims to promote positive student behaviour.

NYGH student Aurora Woo took to social media to defend the teacher who carried out the check,

describing her as "kind, responsible and well liked among students", adding that she was one of the students who was checked by her.

She said the school had admitted that unbuttoning students' uniforms was unnecessary, but that the teacher had already apologised to the cohort for the incident. "The only issue here was the method of enforcement," she added.

Aurora cited neatness and the image of the school as reasons for the importance of the rule, but also said NYGH had taken the students' opinions and suggestions into consideration, and discussions to "make changes to the current rule on bra colour" were under way.

Ms Belinda Tang, who described herself as an "old girl", also said on Facebook in support of the rule: "Uniforms in general are to make every-

FOR EQUALITY

Uniforms in general are to make everyone 'uniform' and egalitarian so that no one is more special or outstanding by virtue of their appearance from an outward flaunting of wealth or power (through owning pretty or expensive undergarments).



MS BELINDA TANG, who described herself as an "old girl" of Nanyang Girls' High School, on Facebook in support of the attire rule.

one 'uniform' and egalitarian so that no one is more special or outstanding by virtue of their appearance from an outward flaunting of wealth or power (through owning pretty or expensive undergarments)."

NYGH would say only that its attire policy "aims to educate our students to be neat and presentable", but did not respond to further queries on how the undergarment rule was communicated to students or enforced, or whether it will be revoked in the near future.

Other schools in Singapore, including co-educational ones, have similar rules in place. For instance, Holy Innocents' High School's website states that its female students are allowed to wear only "skin-coloured or white undergarments", though the school also did not respond to queries on the rationale for the rule or how it is enforced.

The attire rules also extend to students' hairstyles and footwear, among others. "Outlandish and fanciful hairstyles" such as undercut, spiky or punk styles or excessive

styling are not allowed; students are allowed to wear only white canvas shoes or white sports shoes with white socks that cover the ankles.

Ms Amanda Tan was a former student in the now-defunct Ghim Moh Secondary School. It was a mixed-gender school, and a similar rule that disallowed coloured undergarments was in place during her time.

Ms Tan, 33, who works in film and visual arts, said: "Teachers would send a girl home over her black bra... The reason they gave was that (the undergarments) were visible through our white shirts."

She questioned the reasoning behind the rule and the relevance of retaining it today: "Have we not moved on?... I'm surprised Singaporean schools haven't reached at least a moderate middle."

"I wish teachers would spend time imparting knowledge on how to be kind, compassionate and less judgmental... Character over bra checks."

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Madam Alice Hee, her husband and their daughter were waiting to cross the road at Punggol Central near Sumang Lane when a car slammed into the family tail first, pinning Madam Hee to the ground. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

Woman in Punggol accident loses foot

Shabana Begum

A woman who was trapped under a car in an accident in Punggol has lost her left foot and undergone multiple surgical operations to save her remaining foot.

Madam Alice Hee, who is in her 50s, was on her way to the Church of the Transfiguration with her husband and daughter on Feb 3 morning when the accident happened.

They were waiting to cross the road at Punggol Central near Sumang Lane when a car slammed into the family tail first, pinning Madam Hee to the ground. Her left foot was severed and her right foot was crushed under the car. Her husband and daughter suffered bruises and other minor injuries.

Madam Hee, whose occupation is not known, has had four operations and is still recovering in Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. The most recent operation was done last Wednesday, Reverend Joachim Chang, parish priest of the Church of the Transfig-

uration, told The Straits Times last Friday.

Despite the harrowing fortnight, Madam Hee is responding positively to family support, said Father Chang.

Madam Hee and her family declined to speak to the media.

Father Chang, who has been counselling the family and praying for them at the hospital every day since the incident, said: "On the third or fourth day, she was able to smile. She is realistic and clear about her loss. She never wallowed in self-pity or isolated herself.

"Alice cried only when she saw the stitches on her daughter's lip and bruises on her legs."

Father Chang added: "Recently, Alice told me that when she is discharged and gets better, she wants to renew her marriage vows with her husband. I thought that was sweet. In the midst of everything, she could feel the love from her husband and daughter."

Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC MP Sun Xueling visited Madam Hee at the

hospital last Thursday.

"Her husband told me her 'phantom foot', which is now gone, still sends pain signals to her brain. And her remaining foot, which was crushed, gives her great pain," Ms Sun wrote in a Facebook post on Thursday night.

"I see metal apparatus on her bed, on the floor beside her. They looked cold, hard and awkward. I could not help but wince. You could feel the pain in that hospital room. It was on her face, in the air, in our hearts.

"I pray and pray that she will get well and be able to walk again."

Ms Sun, who is Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs and National Development, added that the authorities are reviewing penalties for irresponsible driving, and they will be seeking feedback from the public on criminal penalties.

The 63-year-old driver of the car has been arrested for causing hurt by negligent act and police investigations are ongoing.

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Mobile Health Intervention Optimization

Speaker: Professor Susan Murphy
Susan Murphy is Professor of Statistics at Harvard University, Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, and Professor of Computer Science at the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Her current research interests concern clinical trial design and the development of data analytic methods for informing multi-stage decision making in health, particularly in mobile health. She is a 2013 MacArthur Fellow, a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Medicine. She is currently president of the Bernoulli Society and incoming president of the Institute for Mathematical Statistics.

Mobile devices along with wearable sensors facilitate our ability to deliver supportive behavioral treatments to users anytime and anywhere. Critical questions in the optimization of mobile health interventions include: "Which type of mobile health notification or text message is most beneficial?" and "Does the individual's current context such as location, time, mood impact the usefulness of the mobile health notification?" In this talk we discuss the micro-randomized trial design and associated data analyses for use in optimizing mobile health interventions. We illustrate this approach with the micro-randomized trial of HeartSteps, a physical activity mobile intervention.

Date:
Thursday, 21 Feb 2019

Time:
6:30pm - 7:30pm

Venue:
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Science Drive 1
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Singapore Women's Hall of Fame honours eight trailblazers

Author, soldier, radio producer, policewoman, educators, athletes recognised for their achievements

Joy Pang

Eight women have been inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame (SWHF), which recognises the contributions and achievements of those in the pioneering generation to inspire other young adults to become fellow trailblazers.

The honours list this year included school principal Liew Yuen Sien, radio broadcaster Zahrah Za'ba and Brigadier-General Gan Siow Huang.

Madam Liew Yuen Sien was just 26 when she became principal of Nanyang Girls' School. She held the position for nearly 40 years, playing a pivotal role in fighting for the rights of every girl to have an education, and would try her best to provide them with funding to continue with their schooling.

Under her care, the school's enrolment grew from a few hundred to some two thousand and the girls had a complete education path from kindergarten to pre-university.

Madam Liew was the grandmother of Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu, the second woman to be a Cabinet minister in Singapore after Mrs Lim Hwee Hua. Madam Liew died in 1975.

Madam Zahrah Za'ba, who ran the Malay broadcasting department of Radio Singapore from 1958 to 1974, was a prolific producer of numerous radio plays such as the hugely popular *Esah dan Keluarga-nya*, or *Esah And Her Family*, which she wrote, produced and acted in.

Apart from her success in radio plays, she was also one of the first broadcast journalists in Singapore's Radio Malaya. She died in 1988.

Brigadier-General Gan Siow Huang, the highest-ranking female officer in the Singapore Armed Forces, is another pioneer in her field. A mother of three daughters, she was the commanding officer of



Madam Liew Yuen Sien headed Nanyang Girls' School.



Madam Zahrah Za'ba was a prolific producer of radio plays.



BG Gan Siow Huang is SAF's highest-ranking female officer.



Author Tham Yew Chin received the Cultural Medallion in 2009.



Glory Barnabas won the 1973 SEAP Games 200m gold medal.



K. Jayamani won the 1983 SEA Games marathon gold medal.



Ms Florence Chua is the first female deputy police commissioner.



Ms Evelyn Norris was principal of Raffles Girls' School.

the Republic of Singapore Air Force's 203 squadron when she gave birth to her second child. She eventually climbed the ranks to become brigadier-general in 2015.

Despite her exacting duties, she still finds the time to mentor young students as part of the Young Women's Leadership Connection mentoring programme.

The others who made it to the honours list were award-winning author Tham Yew Chin, sprinter Glory Barnabas, long-distance runner K. Jayamani, director of the Criminal Investigation Division Florence Chua and educator Evelyn Norris, who died in 2014.

Inductees can have immensely diverse backgrounds, but all must have made significant and enduring contributions to society, helping to open new frontiers for women in Singapore. The selection panel was chaired by Professor Tommy Koh.

Past inductees have included President Halimah Yacob, who joined the Hall of Fame in 2014. She will be present at this year's induction ceremony at The St Regis Singapore hotel on March 23.

Ms Clara Lim, programmes executive of SWHF, hopes that by raising the profiles of these individuals, more young women will be inspired to pursue their dreams.

"We started the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame because women's contributions and achievements have not always had the recognition they deserve. Women do not feature prominently in our documented, official history," said Ms Lim.

"This is not a problem unique to Singapore; it's a universal problem. Until fairly recently, women pretty much everywhere were considered to play a secondary role in life to men, and this is reflected in the scant recognition given to their contributions."

Judging by the feedback, the message of female empowerment seems to have been well-received.

"The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame has inspired me to step out of my comfort zone and do things to make a difference to others," Claire Tay, a second-year student from CHJ Secondary, said.

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Ong Wui Teck had made various allegations against Justice Woo Bih Li and the Supreme Court in two affidavits he filed in 2016, to support his attempt to have Justice Woo recused from hearing all actions related to his mother's estate. The High Court last week found him guilty of contempt. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

'Judge-shoppers' who make false allegations face stern action: AGC

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

The Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) has warned of stern action against those who make contemptuous allegations against a judge in order to get another judge to hear their case.

Such "judge-shopping or forum-shopping" amounts to a serious interference with the administration of justice, said an AGC spokesman in the first case here where a litigant was found guilty of court contempt for allegations made in his affidavits.

The AGC remarks last Thursday came in response to queries from The Straits Times in relation to the High Court's judgment a day earlier which found Ong Wui Teck guilty of "scandalising contempt and contempt in the face of the court".

Justice Belinda Ang, who heard the case, said Ong's allegations were baseless and "his wilful insults clearly went beyond the legal scales for recusal applications, traversing into the law of contempt and breaching the same".

A recusal application refers to an attempt to have a judge or prosecutor withdrawn.

Ong had made various allegations against Justice Woo Bih Li and the Supreme Court in two affidavits he filed in 2016, to support his attempt to have Justice Woo recused from hearing all actions related to his mother's estate.

He had claimed "biasness", pre-judgment and lack of independence on the part of Justice Woo, who was also the trial judge in an earlier action relating to his father's estate.

When the judge heard Ong's call to recuse himself, he decided to do so because he intended to complain about Ong's conduct to the appropriate authorities.

The AGC subsequently notified Ong that his allegations in the affidavits in the recusal application were in contempt. But he still refused to withdraw his allegations

and apologise.

In 2017, the Attorney-General obtained leave from the High Court to apply for a committal order for contempt against Ong, listing in the application some 18 allegations he had made.

At the committal hearing last August, the AG, represented by Mr Khoo Boo Jin, Ms Elaine Lew and Ms May Ng, argued that all the allegations exceeded what is fair criticism typical in a recusal application and that Ong's motive was to "forum shop". Mr Khoo added that the language Ong used was "outrageous and abusive" and unsupported by evidence.

Ong, who represented himself in the hearing, claimed there were rational bases for his allegations, arguing his criticism of Justice Woo was necessary to succeed in his move to have the judge recuse himself.

Justice Ang found Ong's allegations of "extreme biasness" against Justice Woo were not made in good faith, and posed a real risk of undermining public confidence in the administration of justice.

She said Ong was simply interested in "procuring Justice Woo's recusal" from various legal proceedings. His sentencing date is due to be fixed.

Common law was applied in Ong's case as the allegations were made before the commencement date of the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act on Oct 1, 2017.

The AGC clarified that the common law of contempt provides that statements made in good faith in an affidavit, or to seek the disqualification of a judge, do not amount to contempt of court. This was not the case with Mr Ong's affidavits.

"This is the first Singapore case where a person has been found guilty of contempt of court for allegations made in his affidavits.

"However, there have been similar cases in Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong," said an AGC spokesman.

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Engineer jailed for stealing from IMDA

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A desktop engineer out on bail for a theft-related offence ended up working with the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) where he stole over \$62,000 worth of equipment before selling them on online marketplace Carousell.

Malaysian Soh Jun Sheng was yesterday jailed for two years after pleading guilty to seven counts of performing unauthorised modification to a computer's contents.

He had also admitted to one count each of criminal breach of trust as well as trespassing to commit theft.

A court heard that Soh, 22, was out on bail when he joined NCS as a

desktop engineer on March 26 last year.

He was deployed to IMDA that same day and granted access to a few secured rooms at IMDA's office in Pasir Panjang Road. Soh's role was to provide IT support to IMDA and issue laptops to its employees.

But between April and June last year, he took items including 80 power adaptors, 30 laptops and six iPads belonging to IMDA.

Intending to sell the equipment on Carousell, Soh formatted the hard drives on the laptops and installed clean copies of the Windows 10 operating system.

Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP) Tan Hsiao Tien said Soh had to do that "to ensure that the purchasers would be able to use the laptops

without being locked out by the security systems originally installed in the laptops for IMDA's use". IMDA did not authorise the modifications.

One of Soh's NCS colleagues uncovered the crime when it was realised that 10 laptops were missing from IMDA's office. The colleague alerted police on June 4 last year.

Soh was arrested later that day and some of the items were recovered from his home. But by then, Soh had already sold part of his loot for more than \$28,000.

The items Soh sold were recovered from the buyers, except for two power adaptors, the court heard.

DPP Tan said: "Most of the money he received was spent in the casinos, while the remainder

had been used to pay his bank debts or was spent on his daily expenses."

Soh was out on bail for trespassing to commit theft when he joined NCS.

The court heard that on Nov 16, 2017, Soh had entered a house in Chishurst Grove near Lorong Chuan at around 1.30am, while its occupants were asleep. He stole \$3,750 worth of items including a camera, an Apple MacBook computer, as well as \$900 in cash.

Although he got away, police were able to identify him and he was arrested two weeks later. All the items stolen from the house were recovered.

Soh has made no restitution.

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Fewer advisories since Orchard Rd smoking ban

NEA to continue issuing verbal warnings to smokers until actual enforcement starts from April

Ng Huiwen

Since Orchard Road turned smoke-free when a smoking ban kicked in on Jan 1, the number of advisories issued for smoking outside designated zones has fallen by 60 per cent.

Six weeks ago, the National Environment Agency (NEA) said in a Facebook post last Friday, there was an average of 1,900 advisories a day.

But this figure has since dipped to an average of 710 advisories a day last week.

More than 42,600 advisories were issued from Jan 1 to Feb 10, with most of them issued at 313@Somerset, Orchard Central, Cathay Cineleisure Orchard and Mandarin Gallery.

The majority of the advisories were issued from 1pm to 9pm, and on Sundays. Mondays and Tuesdays had the fewest number of advisories.

Around 70 per cent of the advi-

sories were given to locals, while 30 per cent were to foreigners.

In the Facebook post, NEA noted that smokers are becoming more familiar with the locations of the 50 designated smoking zones along Orchard Road.

NEA said it will take an "advisory approach" from January to March, the first three months of the roll-out.

Those caught smoking outside the designated smoking areas will receive a verbal warning.

NEA also said smokers have generally been receptive when advised by officers and volunteers to comply with the law.

With actual enforcement to take place come April, NEA said it is engaging mall managements in Orchard Road and advising tenants and employees to join the Health Promotion Board's I Quit programme.

NEA is also working with the Singapore Tourism Board, the airport and seaport to inform tourists of Orchard Road's no-smoking zone.

"We will continue to raise the public's awareness of where smoking is allowed in the Orchard Road precinct," said the agency.

Orchard Road Business Association executive director Steven Goh said feedback from stakeholders



A poster at Orchard Road MRT station informing commuters of the smoking ban. The National Environment Agency said in its Facebook post that smokers are becoming more familiar with the locations of the 50 designated smoking zones along the shopping belt. ST FILE PHOTO

1,900

The average number of advisories a day six weeks ago.

710

The average number of advisories a day last week.

and visitors has been positive.

"Since the implementation of the no-smoking zone, the Orchard Road pedestrian thoroughfare is comparatively cleaner for all non-smoking visitors, while smokers have adjusted to smoking within the designated smoking areas," he added.

Dr Reginald Liew, a senior consultant cardiologist and a director at Harley Street Heart and Cancer Centre, said the introduction of the no-smoking zone is an important step towards reducing the burden of heart disease among active smokers, as well as non-smokers.

"Smoking remains one of the major modifiable risk factors to the de-

velopment of coronary artery disease and stroke," he said.

"The harmful particles found in cigarette smoke can make the blood more 'sticky' and lead to the build-up of plaque in the blood vessels of the heart which can suddenly rupture and cause a heart attack."

He added that non-smokers are also at risk if they inhale cigarette smoke, with multiple studies showing that repeated exposure to second-hand smoke can damage the heart and blood vessels.

This increases the risk of heart attack and stroke by 20 per cent to 30 per cent in children and adults.

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Dazzling Chingay going to the heartland



The bicentennial edition of this year's Chingay parade saw 6,500 performers from more than 50 local and foreign contingents dazzling the crowd with their electrifying performances. The parade kicked off last Friday and ended on Sunday with the largest street performance and float parade in Asia staged in Chinatown, as part of Chingay 2019 @ Heartlands. Crowds braved the rain to catch performers on stage – including dancers from Lanzhou, China, performing a dance titled Jasmine Blossom (right) – as well as watch colourful floats (above) cruise down Eu Tong Sen Street. Residents of Marsiling-Yew Tee and Tampines GRCs can view the Chingay floats this weekend on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. The float display moves to Jurong West on March 2 and to Wisma Geylang Serai on March 16.

ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE



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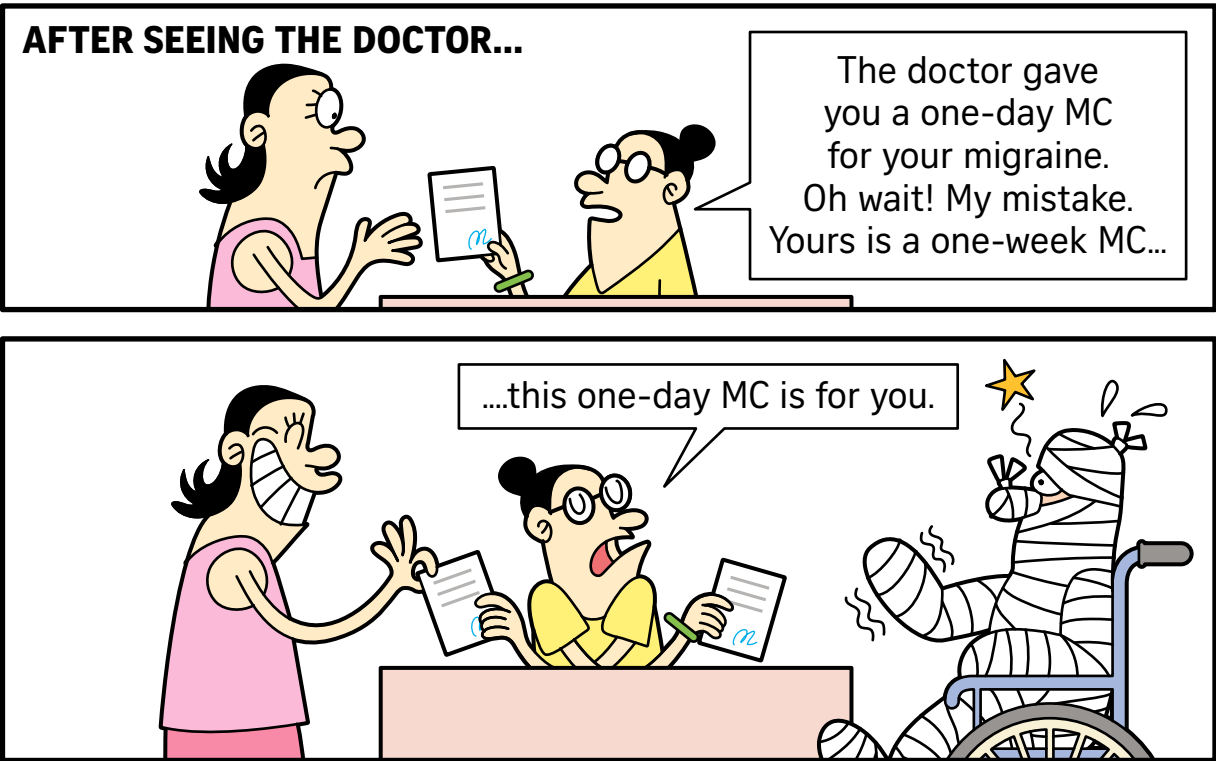
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FORUM

deedhan's TAKE



Firms pressure doctors to minimise medical leave for injured migrant workers

Case of lack of subsidy for Chas patient raises questions

Government policies, which are based on very good intentions and in the public interest, are sometimes stymied by deep-seated bureaucracy, lack of heart and lack of communication and integration (Chas patient not subsidised for polyclinic X-rays, Feb 15).

The failure of the Community Health Assist Scheme-registered clinic to apprise its patient of the limits of subsidies on its referrals and Medisave restrictions on X-rays makes it partly responsible for her medical cost problem.

The clinic should have clearly laid down the financial implications and suggested other probable options for her.

The problem is really a failure of the many levels or parties involved in the process.

I am sure this cannot be the first case experienced by the Chas clinic or the Ministry of Health's (MOH) outpatient departments.

The staff of these departments should have been more alert to such problems of charging. What is the role of the financial counsellors of such clinics?

Such problems should have been caught much earlier and brought up for review and/or discussed with Chas clinics on what they should advise their patients in the event such referrals are necessary.

And what about the top officials in MOH? Have they no overriding powers to take action to sort out the issue?

What is the role of the Agency for Integrated Care?

And what about the Central Provident Fund Board? What is its role in making Medisave more accessible for the poor?

Lim Ang Yong

GP-polyclinic tie-up will benefit all

Senior health correspondent Salma Khalik raised pertinent questions about the issue of subsidies for Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) patients (Think through subsidy issue of Chas patients referred for polyclinic tests, Feb 15).

The report (Chas patient not subsidised for polyclinic X-rays, Feb 15) appears to raise doubts about the ability and clinical acumen of general practitioners (GPs).

In reality, GPs in Singapore today are much better trained and accredited than they were decades ago. GPs are on a par with if not better trained and more experienced than many polyclinic doctors. Just like polyclinic doctors, GPs serve as front-line doctors who many patients first approach for consultation.

In addition, GP clinics are often very conveniently located throughout Singapore and easily accessible for most of the public.

With these advantages, it makes good sense to have GPs registered to see and manage Chas patients.

This not only reduces the heavy load on polyclinic doctors, but also helps to save time for many patients.

There is immense merit in harnessing these advantages by including GPs as part of the team in partnership with polyclinic doctors in providing front-line healthcare.

On the contrary, there is little benefit in differentiating them into public or private and registered or not registered to see Chas patients, and doubting whether tests and investigations ordered by GPs are appropriate or not.

After all, doctors, whether working in the private or public sector, work first in the interest of patients and in accordance with their professional training and experience.

It will be a win-win situation for patients, GPs and polyclinic doctors if there is a partnership arrangement between polyclinics and GPs. This will help to simplify the process, reduce unnecessary hurdles and shorten the waiting time for patients to be seen, treated and followed up on.

With a growing ageing population, there is a heavy demand on the healthcare system, especially in the management of chronic illnesses.

Undoubtedly, GPs will play an increasingly important role in our healthcare system. It makes sense to work out a positive and practical partnership scheme between polyclinics and GPs to meet the healthcare needs of Singaporeans.

Ho Ting Fei (Dr)

GPs, polyclinic doctors want good outcomes for patients

Doctors in the private sector, in particular general practitioners, are on the same page as polyclinics in managing primary healthcare costs effectively and compassionately, especially for the needy and deserving patients on the Community Health Assist and Pioneer Generation schemes.

Many times for uncomplicated problems, doctors try to keep the total for such patients to within the \$18 to \$28 subsidy range so that these patients are treated for free.

But investigations for recalcitrant problems that don't respond to primary courses of treatment can be exorbitant, and GPs have to comply with the acceptable standards of medical practice and avoid any misdiagnosis without adequate investigations. Referring patients to a polyclinic for relevant investigations to save costs is the most appropriate course of action.

In a written reply, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said because the tests were not ordered by the polyclinic doctors, they are "unable to determine whether the ordered tests or investigations are appropriate" (Chas patient not subsidised for polyclinic X-rays, Feb 15).

This implies that GPs, many of whom have decades of experience, are not as qualified as polyclinic doctors in determining the suitability of diagnostic procedures.

If there is mistrust of GP professionalism, polyclinics may insist that patient referral forms for investigations be completed with comprehensive medical notes to be reviewed a second time in the polyclinic, much as this seems totally superfluous.

Doctors and clinicians can always call each other formally or otherwise if any concerns or doubts about patient investigations or treatments arise, and these have almost always had satisfactory professional resolution. It is unnecessary to use the GP as the whipping boy for faults in the subsidised healthcare system.

Yik Keng Yeong (Dr)

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Azhar Kasman is the Editor of Stomp, SPH's award-winning citizen-journalism site, and also a Content Strategist for SPH's English, Malay, Tamil Media Group. Besides his editorial duties, Azhar explores new digital technologies and innovations for the newsroom and works closely with business clients to help them conceptualise and execute their digital content strategies.

Navjot Pawera is the director and head of design at Buuuk, a Singapore-based tech studio that has helped government and private organisations win international awards with their innovative digital solutions. He had previously worked with clients in India and Norway before working in Singapore.

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How much did Hyflux board know when it okayed retail bonds?

The authorities should look into how much the Hyflux board knew or ought to have known when it approved the issue of the final tranche of unsecured retail bonds (Hyflux chief 'deeply saddened' by investors' pain, Feb 16).
By the time the last tranche of

unsecured retail bonds was issued, what was the financial picture of the company presented to the board?
On the basis of that picture, could the board be said to have acted reasonably and responsibly in approving the issue?
Did any member of the board

raise concern about issuing the bonds to the general public given the company's financial situation?
If so, who in the board gave the assurances that persuaded the board to approve the issue, and what were those assurances?
Given that the tranche was open

not just to sophisticated investors, but also ordinary members of the public and old folk with hard-earned retirement savings, there is a need to thoroughly investigate how the Hyflux board came to approve the issue.
Cheng Shoong Tat

Re-engineer established industries to help PMETs

Since 2012, when foreign investments reached an all-time high of \$16 billion, the Economic Development Board (EDB) has met or exceeded its forecast for all indicators every year (Singapore attracts \$10.9b in investments, beating forecast, Feb 15).
EDB must be congratulated for it. However, since then, foreign investments have been declining, with last year's number at only 68 per cent of the all-time high figure.
The issue of professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs) being retrenched and having trouble

finding jobs continues to be a problem today.
This begs the question whether EDB should be measuring itself against new indicators.
EDB is one of the key institutions responsible for the continued economic success of Singapore. But unless it sets itself stretch goals, different goals and demanding goals, Singaporeans will find it difficult to accept that EDB has met or exceeded all indicators for the past seven years while PMETs continue to struggle to find jobs.
For instance, the Ministry of

Trade and Industry stated in 2014 that the Singapore economy would grow at around 3 per cent per year on average for the next decade.
Perhaps EDB should set itself a stretch goal that addresses the question: "What will it take to bring in investments that would help the Singapore economy grow at 5 per cent per year on average?"
Also, when multinational companies within a cluster shift their operations out of Singapore, they leave behind a massive trail of displaced PMETs with mismatched skills who are unable to fit into the exotic new industries.

For example, it is not difficult to imagine that the current workforce will have problems adapting to the new industry cluster of autonomous vehicles and smart mobility systems that EDB has indicated it will take the lead in developing.
Perhaps the goal should be to re-engineer established industries such as electronics, petrochemical, biomedical and aerospace, where the ecosystems are in place and PMETs have a better chance of transitioning to higher value-added activities.
Liu Fook Thim

OnFacebook

What new tourist attractions and activities should Singapore offer?

Bring in major niche sporting events that resonate with our youth and which take advantage of our unique destination features to entice the organisers. Examples include ultimate frisbee played at the Padang, floorball played in Orchard Road, cross-country run held in Pulau Ubin, and e-sports events held at one of the major malls.
Lionel Teo

We should broaden the use of WeChat Pay and Alipay to tap into the Chinese market – our top source of tourist earnings.
KP Tan

Should companies be given a quota to hire people with disabilities?

Maybe tie the foreign worker quota with disabled local worker numbers to encourage companies in need of manpower to also hire this group of workers.
Edwin Chua

I don't agree with implementing a quota for hiring people with disabilities. There are certain jobs that are not suitable for this group of people and so, some companies do not have positions suitable for them. I feel the current system of providing incentives and rewards to encourage employers to hire workers with disabilities is the right way to go.
Kok Siong

Should attempted suicide be decriminalised?

People with suicidal tendencies are likely to engage in riskier activities if suicide is an offence, with the mindset that "I have to succeed or I will be penalised". However, if suicide cases are seen as a cry for help instead of a crime, it might actually decrease the mortality rate of suicide cases.
Desmond Yfm
They are crying for help. They should be treated with compassion.
Maya Todd

Term 'museum' being used too freely

As an art historian, I am obliged to highlight a misnomer in the Report on Moca@Loewen (Museum of Contemporary Arts closes after 9 years, Feb 14).
This concerns the use of the term "museum".
The International Council of Museums (Icom) defines a museum as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development... communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment".
However, the report keeps referring to Moca as a "museum".
By Icom's definition, Moca is not a museum, whether private or

public, and did not operate like one. It is a commercial art space and has engaged in the sale of artworks.
Furthermore, the report states that Moca "was the first museum specialising in contemporary art when it opened in 2009".
I believe that the Singapore Art Museum was the first museum in Singapore that specialised in contemporary art when it opened in 1996.
It seems that we have been using the term "museum" rather freely and loosely.
This was also the case with the Museum of Art and Design, which closed in 2017 and was not, by any definition of the term, a museum.
Jeffrey Say Seck Leong

FORUM ONLINE

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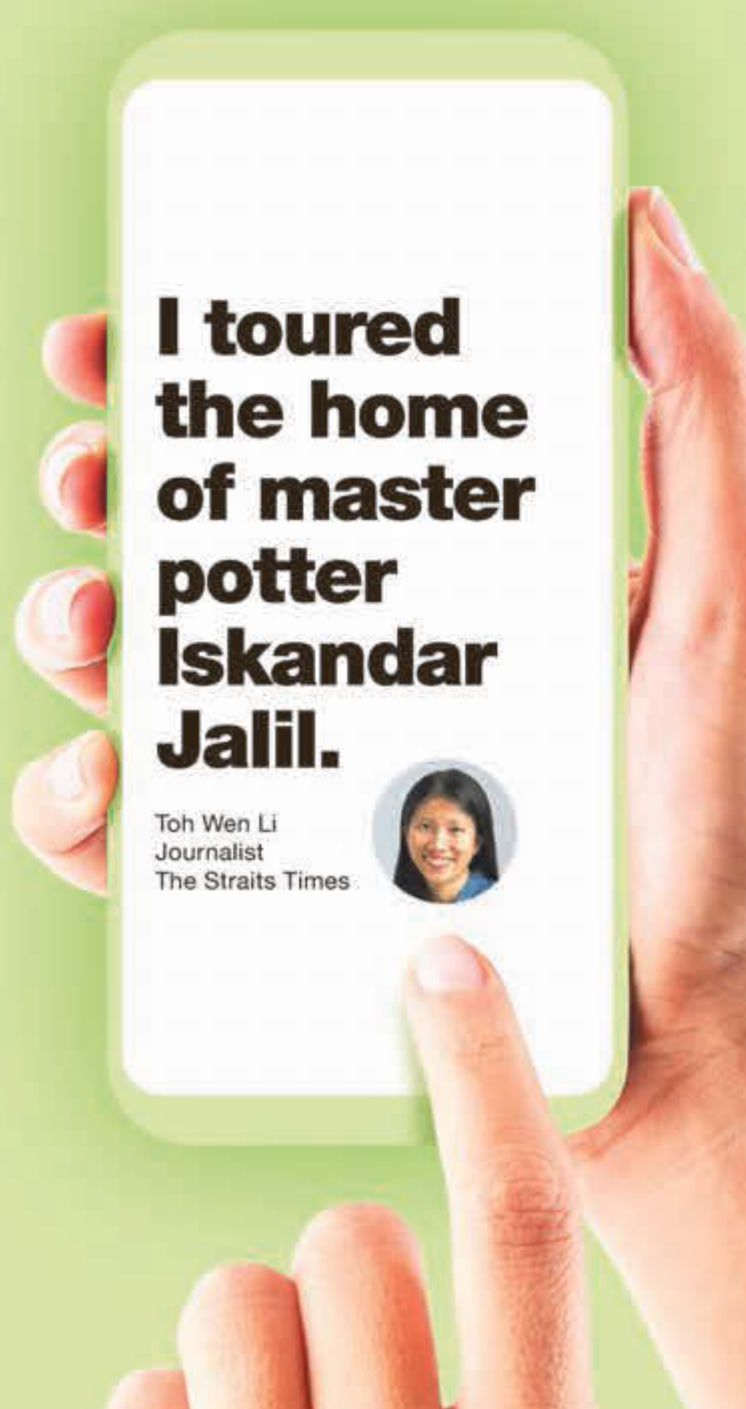
Explore one-stop centre for those with disabilities

We should start exploring how to address the needs of those with invisible disabilities, such as autism, mental illnesses and cognitive impairment, while promoting inclusiveness in a holistic manner.
One possibility is to convert part of a university campus into an "enabling town", which can house a one-stop centre for those with disabilities, their families, service providers and employers.
This will allow those with disabilities to purchase affordable

housing where they can learn to live independently, while their caretakers can rent a room nearby to help them transition.
Service providers such as therapy and activity centres, together with employers such as sheltered workshops and social enterprises, will only be a short distance from their homes.
University students, especially those training to be therapists and social workers, will have many opportunities to interact and volunteer with the community.

The disabled community can participate in campus activities to further enhance the spirit of inclusion, and those with the requisite abilities can also sign up to be students of the university.
This win-win arrangement eliminates stigma, promotes inclusion, provides support and grants opportunities to those with invisible disabilities.
Let us do more to convert symbolic support for inclusion into concrete solutions.
Dino Trakakis

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Get into the swing

A boy swinging in a rattan basket on field day at Tiong Bahru Secondary School in Lower Delta Road on Sept 3, 1978. The event was organised jointly by the scouts group and volunteers from Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project.

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Teacher **Brandon** graduated with a first-class honours degree in English Literature from Nanyang Technological University and qualified for the dean's list. A teacher at The Write Corner, he values critical and inventive thinking in both reading and writing.

Teacher **Abigail** is an English Language major at the National University of Singapore. She has taught and designed English curriculum in MOE schools and reputable learning centres. She enjoys breaking down challenging literary techniques into digestible writing techniques for students to apply in their compositions.

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THE TRAINERS

A veteran media professional, **Geoffrey Pereira** has taken on various journalistic and media support roles in The Straits Times since 1986. Prior to that, he was a philosophy tutor at the National University of Singapore while working on his postgraduate degree.

A senior journalist at The Straits Times, **Shefali Rekhi** is also an editor at Asia News Network, an alliance of 23 news media. She is one of the key anchors in ST's initiatives to fight fake news.

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S'pore non-oil exports slide 10.1% in January

Drop is biggest since Oct 2016, with both electronic and non-electronic shipments falling

Singapore's trade sector began the year on a whimper with non-oil domestic exports (Nodx) for last month sliding by a worse-than-expected 10.1 per cent from a year ago.

This is the biggest contraction since exports slumped 12 per cent in October 2016. Analysts polled by Bloomberg were expecting a decline, but of 3.5 per cent, given the high base effect of January last year, when exports rose 13 per cent.

The drop last month was also the third straight month of decline after an 8.5 per cent fall in December and 2.8 per cent decrease in November, Enterprise Singapore figures released yesterday showed.

Ms Selena Ling, OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy, said the magnitude of the decline shows 2019 is starting on a "soft footing for trade".

Both electronic and non-electronic shipments shrank.

Exports of electronic products were down 15.9 per cent year on year last month, after an 11.2 per cent fall in the previous month. The decline was led by personal computers (-34.3 per cent), disk media products (-29.2 per cent), and inte-

grated circuits (-6.8 per cent).

Shipments of non-electronic products fell 7.9 per cent, after falling 7.4 per cent in December. This was due mostly to declines in exports of specialised machinery (-32.8 per cent), pharmaceuticals (-11.8 per cent), and non-electric engines and motors (-40.9 per cent).

Mr Robert Carnell, ING's chief economist and head of research, Asia-Pacific, said: "Although it looks bad, and there is a temptation to draw a very negative conclusion from today's figures, there is a chance that we are seeing the seasonal low for electronics."

"These have a tendency to trough in February... A slight shifting in the seasonal norms for electronics might have brought forward the low point this year to January, and means we could see a bounce in February."

But he added: "That said, any such seasonal bounce might prove very short-lived, and the negative petrochemical result is very worrying. This points to a broad weakness in external demand, with these products ubiquitous in almost all production and packaging."

Exports to all of Singapore's top 10 markets declined last month, led by China (-25.4 per cent), South Korea (-31.4 per cent) and Hong Kong (-11.7 per cent).

"Understandably, North Asian markets were likely most impacted



Exports to all of Singapore's top 10 markets declined last month, led by China (-25.4 per cent), South Korea (-31.4 per cent) and Hong Kong (-11.7 per cent). Exports to the US reversed course to fall by 4.6 per cent last month, after rising 31.1 per cent in December. ST FILE PHOTO

SOMETHING TO BEAR IN MIND

Before turning overly bearish, it may be worth considering the possibility that purchasing managers may have cut back on their orders too drastically when the trade war was at its worst.



DBS ECONOMIST IRVIN SEAH

by the US-China trade tensions, but other regional Nodx markets were also soft in January," Ms Ling noted.

The fall in shipments to China, Sin-

gapore's single largest market – after the previous month's 15.4 per cent expansion – was led by non-monetary gold (-94.9 per cent), specialised machinery (-55.2 per cent) and measuring instruments (-40.9 per cent). Exports to the United States reversed course to fall by 4.6 per cent last month, after rising 31.1 per cent in December.

Nonetheless, DBS economist Irvin Seah said: "Before turning overly bearish, it may be worth considering the possibility that purchasing managers may have cut back on their orders too drastically when the trade war was at its worst."

On a month-on-month seasonally adjusted basis, Nodx was down 5.7 per cent last month, following December's 4 per cent decline, due also to falls in both electronic and non-electronic Nodx.

For last year, figures released last

Friday showed that Nodx growth slowed sharply to 4.2 per cent from 8.8 per cent in 2017, with exports dipping 1.1 per cent in the final quarter of 2018.

Enterprise Singapore has maintained its growth forecasts for Nodx at 0 to 2 per cent for this year.

Said Ms Ling: "Our 2019 Nodx forecast is -0.2 per cent year on year, which is slightly lower than the official forecast. We'll have to see the February performance for a better picture of the Q1 2019 Nodx performance, given that January-February is typically volatile due to the timing of the Chinese New Year festive season too."

"Pending the outcome of the US-China trade talks and if the March 1 deadline for the 90-day truce for fresh tariffs will be extended, the soft Nodx patch may potentially drag beyond March into Q2 2019."

Luxury homes retain appeal despite curbs

Some of Singapore's most desirable houses come with a catch: Only locals can own them.

That foreign buyers – notably from China – who for years helped drive demand for luxury homes, cannot buy these dwellings has not dented their appeal. Their scarcity and the exclusivity they confer have pushed prices of these homes – known as Good Class Bungalows, or GCBs – to record highs even as the broader property market cools.

Only about 2,500 GCBs dot the city-state, ranging from colonial-era houses to architect-designed modern homes with cantilevered verandas, infinity pools and expansive landscaped gardens – a world away from the high-rise apartments most Singaporeans call home.

In a recent blockbuster deal, Mr Tony Tung, chairman of Hong Kong-based oil trader Winson Group, bought a bungalow near the Botanic Gardens for \$105.3 million – a record for a GCB, it was reported earlier this month.

Nearby, a Singaporean member of the Tsai family, which made its fortune in insurance in Taiwan, snapped up a bungalow for \$93.9 million.

More records may soon be broken. A new bungalow near the Botanic Gardens, featuring a central courtyard pool and water garden, will soon hit the market with an asking price of \$3,500 per sq ft. That would surpass the previous record of \$2,700 per sq ft set last year, according to Mr K. H. Tan at Newsman Realty, who is handling the sale.



Ms Sammi Lim, director of capital markets at real estate agency CBRE Group, said: "Due to scarcity and exclusivity, the GCB market has always been regarded as the jewel of the residential market and a coveted trophy asset to the well-heeled community. GCBs have proven to be a resilient asset class through market cycles."

That is proving to be the case again as a rally in home prices stalls, following the imposition of further property curbs in the middle of last year. House values declined 0.1 per cent in the three months ended Dec 31, snapping

\$105.3m

Sum that Mr Tony Tung, chairman of Hong Kong-based oil trader Winson Group, paid for a bungalow near the Botanic Gardens.

\$93.9m

Sum that a Singaporean member of the Tsai family, which made its fortune in insurance in Taiwan, paid for a bungalow, also near the Botanic Gardens.

five straight quarterly gains.

The citizenship requirement is not the only restriction on GCBs. The plot must be at least 1,400 sq m, and the house cannot take up more than 35 per cent of the land or be over two storeys high. Such luxurious use of space is another status symbol in one of the world's most densely populated countries, where about 7,900 people are crammed into each square kilometre.

Singapore is also one of the world's wealthiest nations – home to the ninth-highest number of millionaires – according to Credit Suisse Research Institute's 2018

Global Wealth Report.

That has helped underpin activity in the GCB market, with the number of transactions rising 47 per cent in the second half of last year, compared with the first six months of that year, according to CBRE.

Typical buyers are super-wealthy locals and foreigners who have attained citizenship, said Mr Tan, managing director at Newsman Realty, which specialises in bungalow deals. "The super-rich want to buy the best diamond, the best car, so in Singapore residential, the Good Class Bungalow is the best you can get," he added. BLOOMBERG

There are only about 2,500 Good Class Bungalows in Singapore, such as those in Peirce Road, near the Botanic Gardens.

PHOTO: CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

BUDGET 2019 | Excerpts from Budget speech

Taking Singapore forward in a fast-changing world

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday delivered a Budget aimed at helping Singapore thrive in a rapidly changing global environment as well as meet longer-term domestic challenges such as ageing, social mobility and economic transformation. Highlights include a Merdeka Generation Package that will benefit nearly 500,000 Singaporeans and a special \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus to mark what he called a key turning point in Singapore's development. Here are edited excerpts from his Budget speech.

This year marks 200 years since Sir Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore.

1819 was a key turning point in Singapore's development. The British decision to declare Singapore a free port plugged us into an emerging network of global trade. This, and subsequent developments, transformed Singapore into a global node.

In our bicentennial year, let us reflect on the twists and turns in our history, so as to chart a path forward for an even better future for our people.

CHARTING OUR PATH FORWARD

Today, we are in a different phase of globalisation, with new forces re-shaping the global environment.

In last year's Budget Statement, I mentioned three major shifts:

- The shift in global economic weight towards Asia,
- Rapid technological advancements,
- And changing demographic patterns.

A fourth major force that is gaining prominence is the decline in support for globalisation. Some countries are benefiting from globalisation, while others are questioning its value.

These four major forces are interacting in complex ways, at the global, regional, and national levels. On the global stage, the trade frictions between the US and China are developing into a deeper strategic competition of strength and of governance systems. This is raising geopolitical uncertainty.

Domestically, we need to address longer-term challenges, including ageing, social mobility, inequality, economic transformation, and climate change.

OUR STRENGTHS AND OUR SINGAPOREAN DNA

The changing global and domestic landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. We will continue to chart our way forward confidently in the Singapore way, building on our distinct strengths and our Singaporean DNA.

We are fundamentally resilient to challenges with grit and determination. There were episodes in the centuries of Singapore's history where our island's fortunes waned due to external forces. These are sobering reminders that we have to constantly build up our security and resilience, and plan long-term.

As a multi-cultural society, our openness to diversity is our strength. It has been an important part of our global mindset and deepened our knowledge of Asia. We strive to be a place where people and ideas congregate, at the frontier of global developments. We want to be a Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise.

We turn our size and strategic location into an advantage.

Technological shifts have spread economic activities more widely, and at the same time, made cities more important as key nodes of enterprise and innovation. As a city-state, we are nimble and can adapt to changes faster. We serve as a neutral, trusted node in key spheres of global activity. Like Sangkanil, the small but quick-witted mousedeer, we can make our way in the world.

Budget 2019 is a strategic plan to align resources to build a Strong, United, and Prosperous Singapore.

In this bicentennial year, let us draw on our strengths, and our

Singaporean DNA – openness, multiculturalism, and self-determination – to continue to progress.

At a fundamental level, we must build Singapore safe and secure. We must continue to transform our economy, for only a vibrant and innovative economy can provide opportunities for our people to realise their potential.

We must continue to build a caring and inclusive society, one where we look out for one another, and all of us play our part in weaving a tightly-knit social fabric.

We must continue to build Singapore as a global city and home for all, keeping it smart, sustainable, and globally connected.

Last but not least, we must achieve these goals in a responsible and fiscally sustainable way.

KEEPING SINGAPORE SAFE AND SECURE

A safe and secure Singapore gives us the confidence to chart an independent course.

Against an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment, our commitment to defence and security cannot waver. Diplomacy and deterrence are the twin pillars of our approach.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs works continuously to build good relations with our neighbours and the major powers, and to promote a rules-based international order with international laws and norms.

A strong Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) lends weight to our diplomatic efforts and ensures that negotiations with Singapore are taken seriously. Should diplomacy fail, we must stand ready to safeguard our interests, and defend ourselves.

The Home Team also works round-the-clock alongside our security agencies, to ensure a safe environment for all.

We also now have the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore leading our efforts to protect our Critical Information Infrastructure from cyber threats, and to create a secure cyberspace for businesses and our Singaporean DNA.

These are fundamental to our sovereignty, our success, and to safeguarding our vital interests. Beyond physical threats, malicious cyber activities are growing. The networked nature of our society has enhanced connectivity. But this can be exploited to disrupt and divide society, through cyber attacks, the spread of falsehoods, or other means. In particular, foreign actors are increasingly using our domestic affairs and politics.

To stay ahead of these threats, we must continue to innovate and build new capabilities to meet our security needs. Both the public and private sectors have a major role to play.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will set up a Home Team Security & Technology Agency by the end of this year, to develop competitive technology capabilities to support the Home Team's operational needs. These capabilities will strengthen the Home Team's ability to carry out its mission of safeguarding Singapore.

With our Smart Nation drive, digital technology has become an integral part of our lives.

To harness the digital advantage, we must be prepared to also deal with threats that arise inevitably from its more pervasive use. Digital Defence has now been incorporated as the sixth pillar of

Total Defence.

The Government is also engaging our tech community with programmes such as the Government Bug Bounty Programme, to achieve a higher level of collective cyber security.

Given its strategic significance, the Government will continue to invest a significant share of our resources – about 30 per cent of our total expenditure this year – to support our defence, security, and diplomacy efforts.

This spending is significant, but indispensable.

SKILLED WORKFORCE, INNOVATIVE FIRMS AND A VIBRANT ECONOMY

A vibrant and innovative economy provides our people with the opportunities to realise their potential and to have a better life.

Our efforts to transform our economy are bearing fruit. In tandem with the global expansion, the Singapore economy grew by 3.2 per cent in 2018.

Good growth translated into good outcomes for our workers. Over the past five years, the real median income of Singaporeans has grown by 3.6 per cent per year.

Global growth is expected to moderate in 2019, while

uncertainties and downside risks in the global economy have increased. Over the years, our sound monetary and fiscal policies have enabled us to weather global economic crises and keep inflation stable. These provide a stable environment for businesses to make long-term investment decisions.

Beyond maintaining a supportive macro-economic environment, we need to build a sound micro-economic foundation, so that resources can be directed to their best possible uses, and to undertake structural reforms, to enable our workers and firms to adapt and stay competitive.

In Budget 2016, we launched the Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs), which drive transformation at the company, industry, and economy-wide levels. Each ITM integrates four key pillars of transformation: jobs and skills; innovation; internationalisation; and productivity. These are mutually reinforcing pillars to maximise impact.

To coordinate efforts, the Future Economy Council brings together leaders from the Government, industry, trade associations and chambers (TACs), unions, and academia.

After three years of intensive work, I am glad that all 23 ITMs have been launched, covering about 80% of our economy. We are seeing good progress, aided by the global economic upturn in recent years.

Productivity, as measured by real value-added per actual hour worked, grew by 3.6 per cent per year in the past three years, higher than the 1.6 per cent per annum growth recorded in the preceding three years, from 2012 to 2015.

In particular, we have seen strong performance by outward-oriented sectors such as manufacturing, while others like construction and some service industries continue to show weaker productivity growth.

But this is a continuing journey. There is much more we can do, especially in sectors like domestic services. We must press on.

Let me now outline three key thrusts in this Budget to support industry transformation:

- First, building deep enterprise capabilities.
- Second, building deep worker capabilities.
- Third, encouraging strong partnerships, within Singapore and across the world.

BUILDING DEEP ENTERPRISE CAPABILITIES

The basic building blocks of a vibrant economy are strong, competitive companies that can maximise value creation. Hence, the first thrust is to support the building of deep enterprise capabilities.

Companies at different stages of growth have different needs. The leadership of each company is in the best position to lead and drive changes, while our agencies can provide support at each stage of growth.

A vibrant start-up ecosystem encourages budding entrepreneurs to try out their business ideas. Such

an ecosystem enables entrepreneurs to connect to mentors, prospective business partners, customers, and investors.

Two years ago, we launched Startup SG to provide holistic support for start-ups and entrepreneurs. Such support ranges from co-investments and proof-of-concept grants, to mentorship and physical space.

Our start-up ecosystem is flourishing.

There are now over 220 venture capital deals per year in Singapore, worth close to US\$4.2 billion, a significant rise from the 80 deals worth US\$136 million in 2012.

Today, more than 150 global venture capital funds, incubators, and accelerators are based in Singapore, supporting start-ups here and in the region.

Start-ups can only thrive if they scale up, and venture into new markets. To help them do so, we will provide support in three areas: providing customised assistance, better financing options, and supporting technology adoption.

Our investment in new firms to identify and overcome the unique challenges they face, and scale up quickly.

Enterprise Singapore will launch a Scale-up SG programme in partnership with the private and public sectors. Scale-up SG will work with aspiring, high-growth local firms to identify and build new capabilities, to innovate, grow, and internationalise.

We will expand the SMEs Go Digital programme. We will also jointly pilot a cross-border innovation platform for SMEs, known as the Business sans Borders, with an artificial intelligence-enabled marketplace to help our SMEs match with buyers and sellers globally.

To help companies in the services sector capture opportunities from digitalisation, the Ministry of Communications and Information launched a pilot of the Digital Services Lab (DSL) in November last year. The DSL brings together industry and the research community, to co-develop digital solutions with sector-wide impact.

For example, the DSL is exploring an additional \$100 million to establish the SME Co-Investment Fund III. As part of the pilot, it will catalyse investment in Singapore-based SMEs that are ready to scale up. We expect that this will bring in at least \$200 million of additional funding.

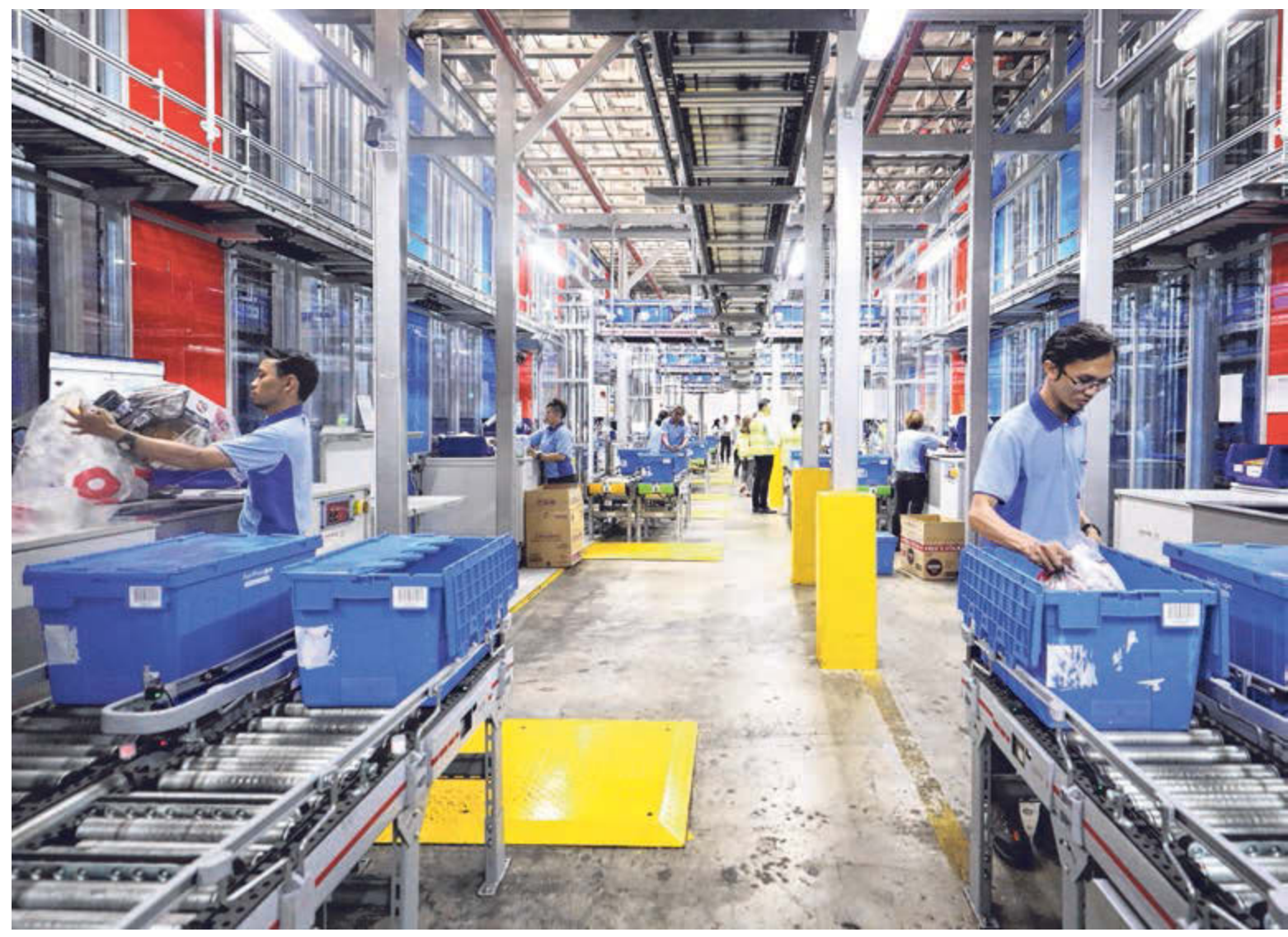
Loan financing remains an important source of funding for SMEs. Our banks have been responding. To catalyse these further, we will enhance the accessibility of loans.

Today, our economic agencies have different financing schemes. To make it simpler for companies, we will streamline the existing financing schemes offered by the agencies.

First, building deep enterprise capabilities. We will extend the Enterprise Financing Scheme (EFS) to support firms to take on up to 70 per cent of the risk for bank loans to these young companies, compared to the current 50 per cent under most existing loan schemes.

HELP FOR SMES TO GO DIGITAL

To support viable SMEs in their day-to-day operations, I will extend the SME Working Capital Loan scheme for about two more years, till March 2024. Since its launch in June 2016, the scheme has catalysed more than \$2.5 billion of loans. We expect the extension to



Pickers at FairPrice distribution centre retrieving ordered items from storage bins brought to them by AutoStore robots. FairPrice's training has helped workers quickly pick up new skills to make use of the new systems, and their work environment is more pleasant and conducive. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

catalyse a further \$1.8 billion. Support for working capital will be folded under the Enterprise Financing Scheme from October.

Our companies and workers must stay on top of rapid advances in technology, especially in digital technology. We will continue to help our SMEs adopt digital technologies.

We launched the SMEs Go Digital programme in Budget 2017. Since then, around 4,000 SMEs have adopted pre-approved digital solutions.

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• BCA and HDB are also testing the use of drones to inspect building facades more effectively.

• Learning from these pilots, government agencies will continue to innovate, and improve the ease of doing business.

ENTERPRISE-CENTRIC APPROACH

Let me now touch on other ways to help build deep enterprise capabilities.

We have more than 200,000 enterprises in Singapore, ranging from large MNCs to our neighbourhood shops.

Today, across each of the four pillars of the ITMs, different agencies provide support in each area. While helpful, companies have often feedback that we could streamline these. I agree.

To better support this broad base of companies with diverse needs, we will draw resources from each agency, but focus support in an enterprise-centric way to better help enterprises at each stage of growth. This will be done in a tiered manner.

To further deepen the pool of leaders globally, we will extend the Automation Support Package (ASP) by two years.

Introduced in Budget 2016, the ASP supports firms to deploy impactful, large-scale automation. It includes support for hardware solutions, and other industry 4.0 technologies.

Since its launch, the ASP has helped more than 300 companies to automate their operations and raise productivity. We will extend the ASP to encourage more companies to do so.

In the same spirit, our government agencies must also embrace technology to serve companies better. We have made progress in this area.

• The Business Grants Portal, launched in 2017, provides a one-stop shop for businesses to identify and apply for the right grant for their plans.

• To make it easier for businesses to transact with the Government, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and relevant agencies are developing a one-stop portal, which will be launched by the end of this year.

• We will also launch a new food services sector by 3Q 2019. Businesses will deal with only one

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members. SBF is also working closely with our TACs.

We will strengthen our support for TACs through the Local Enterprise and Association Development (LEAD) programme. Enterprise Singapore will be developing five-year road maps with TACs that have demonstrated strong leadership and shown ambition to do more for the business community. This will enable them to take on a more strategic and longer-term approach in driving industry transformation.

These TACs will be able to access funding and potentially take in public sector secondees through LEAD.

We will also develop stronger partnerships around the world, at the Government-to-Government and Business-to-Business levels. Our TACs, such as the SBF, have developed international linkages for our businesses.

Over the years, we have supported our trade partners (FTAs) with partner economies, which enlarge our businesses' access to new markets. Just last week, the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) and the EU-Singapore Investment Protection Agreement (EUSIPA) received the European Parliament's consent with a clear majority.

To draw greater value from these trade networks, we will streamline and digitise our trade processes further to raise efficiency. This will enable easier access to overseas markets, and help firms make better use of these FTAs.

Last year, I launched the Singapore Trade Platform (STP), to streamline trade processes and provide a one-stop information management system for traders.

We will also be working with partners to facilitate the secure exchange of electronic trade documents, to unlock further productivity gains.

Mr Sim's story illustrates the point that to succeed, we must learn, we must walk the ground, and we must persist.

Singapore as a Global-Asia node will bring new opportunities for our people, in new frontiers. The second thrust is to prepare and develop our people to make full use of this node. We are partnering firms to invest in our people, including young Singaporeans, to provide them with opportunities to gain working experience abroad.

For instance, Oceanus Group, a local seafood supplier, sent interns from Republic Polytechnic to its operations in China in a range of jobs. One of their former interns, Bernice Chan, is now a management trainee in Oceanus' farm in Fotan, China.

Our third thrust is to build global partnerships, so that our firms and people can forge new areas of collaboration with other firms and people around the world.

In Budget 2017, we started the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA), one of the Committee on the Future Economy's recommendations. We have now established nine nodes in various parts of the world, including Bangkok, Beijing, Berlin, Jakarta, and San Francisco. These GIA nodes give our entrepreneurs and students opportunities to learn and build networks globally.

We are also bringing the global innovation community to come together in Singapore, to explore and collaborate.

Last year, we held the third edition of the Singapore FinTech Festival. This is the world's largest FinTech event.

As part of this festival, the Global Investor Summit brought together investors on our Meet Asean's Investors and Champions (MATCH) event. These investors expressed an interest to invest up to US\$12 billion in Asean enterprises in fintech, info-communications technology, and MedTech over the next three years.

Another technology event, the Singapore Week of Innovation and Technology (SWITCH) brought together more than 350 exhibitors, and 1,000 promising startups, to showcase their innovations.

This year, SWITCH and the Singapore FinTech Festival will be held in the same week in mid-November. We can draw in even more entrepreneurs, investors, and talent from around the world, to explore and collaborate in technology

researchers in NTU, NUS, A*Star, and the industry to translate cutting-edge photonics research into practical applications.

There, I met Nanouev, a Singapore start-up specialising in nanotechnology applications. One of its prototype products, a high-tech screen protector, promises to allow long-sighted users to see clear images on digital devices without their glasses. I am sure this House will support the enabling of us to see issues, far or near, with greater clarity!

To keep the momentum going, we will continue to invest in Centres of Innovation at our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) and research institutes, and to support companies in innovation.

The spirit of entrepreneurship is critical for all these endeavours – having a vision of the future, and taking practical actions, day in, day out, to explore a range of possibilities, even in the face of problems. It is the grit and determination of our entrepreneurs that make a difference.

Mr Sim Wong Hoo, CEO of Creative Technology, brought us the popular Sound Blaster sound cards in the 1990s.

Creative Technology went through a difficult patch after its initial success with the Sound Blaster, but Mr Sim and his team pressed on. After 20 years of R&D costing US\$100 million, the company recently launched the Super X-Fi, a technology that recreates the holographic sound experience in 3D sound, with headphones. It has already won 14 awards at the 2019 Consumer Electronics Show in the US.

Mr Sim's story illustrates the point that to succeed, we must learn, we must walk the ground, and we must persist.

Singapore as a Global-Asia node will bring new opportunities for our people, in new frontiers. The second thrust is to prepare and develop our people to make full use of this node. We are partnering firms to invest in our people, including young Singaporeans, to provide them with opportunities to gain working experience abroad.

For instance, Oceanus Group, a local seafood supplier, sent interns from Republic Polytechnic to its operations in China in a range of jobs. One of their former interns, Bernice Chan, is now a management trainee in Oceanus' farm in Fotan, China.

Our third thrust is to build global partnerships, so that our firms and people can forge new areas of collaboration with other firms and people around the world.

In Budget 2017, we started the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA), one of the Committee on the Future Economy's recommendations. We have now established nine nodes in various parts of the world, including Bangkok, Beijing, Berlin, Jakarta, and San Francisco. These GIA nodes give our entrepreneurs and students opportunities to learn and build networks globally.

We are also bringing the global innovation community to come together in Singapore, to explore and collaborate.

Last year, we held the third edition of the Singapore FinTech Festival. This is the world's largest FinTech event.

As part of this festival, the Global Investor Summit brought together investors on our Meet Asean's Investors and Champions (MATCH) event. These investors expressed an interest to invest up to US\$12 billion in Asean enterprises in fintech, info-communications technology, and MedTech over the next three years.

Another technology event, the Singapore Week of Innovation and Technology (SWITCH) brought together more than 350 exhibitors, and 1,000 promising startups, to showcase their innovations.

This year, SWITCH and the Singapore FinTech Festival will be held in the same week in mid-November. We can draw in even more entrepreneurs, investors, and talent from around the world, to explore and collaborate in technology

innovation in this Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Our economic transformation is progressing well. We must persist with our industry transformation efforts. At the same time, the pace of technological innovation is rapid, and global economic weight is shifting towards Asia. We will position Singapore as a Global-Asia node of technology, innovation and enterprise.

Economic transformation is critical. We expect to spend \$4.6 billion over the next three years on the new and enhanced economic capability-building measures in Budget 2019, and to support Singaporean workers. \$3.6 billion will go towards helping our workers to thrive amid industry and technological disruptions \$1 billion will go towards helping firms build deep enterprise capabilities.

BUDGET
2019

Excerpts from Budget speech

Working together to bring out the best in S'poreans

FROM C3

accessible, and comprehensive.

We have also been providing greater social support within the community to help seniors stay active, through programmes such as the PA Wellness Programme and the Community Networks for Seniors.

Our second social strategy is to provide greater healthcare assurance.

First, doctors at our neighbourhood clinics provide primary care that is easily accessible.

This helps us stay healthy. To enhance access, we will make it more affordable to consult doctors in our neighbourhoods. We introduced the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) in 2012.

CHAS subsidies help lower- to middle-income families by making primary care and basic dental care at clinics near their homes more affordable.

Over 97 per cent of existing CHAS and Pioneer Generation cardholders have access to more than one CHAS clinic within 10 minutes from their homes.

We will enhance CHAS subsidies at GP clinics in three ways:

- i. we will extend CHAS to cover all Singaporeans for chronic conditions, regardless of income.
- ii. Second, lower- to middle-income Singaporeans who are CHAS Orange cardholders currently receive CHAS subsidies for chronic conditions only. We will extend subsidies for common illnesses to this group.
- iii. Third, we will also increase the subsidies for complex chronic conditions.

CHAS makes it possible for more Singaporeans to turn to GP clinics near their homes to manage their chronic conditions.

But we must also put in the measures to ensure that CHAS clinics are delivering good outcomes.

To this end, the Ministry of Health (MOH) will be looking at how to help CHAS clinics better track their patients' progress and outcomes. In a similar vein, MOH will also review its clinical guidelines for care provided at CHAS dental clinics, to ensure that the care delivered is appropriate to the needs of the patient.

With these changes, we expect to pay out more than \$200 million a year in CHAS subsidies.

Second, we will strengthen financial protection for long-term care.

As we age, the chances of having one form of disability or another rises significantly. MOH estimates that one in two healthy Singaporeans aged 65 could become severely disabled in their lifetime, and may need long-term care.

Some of us face a higher risk, some lower. But regardless, low risk does not mean no risk. The best way of protecting ourselves is to lead a healthy lifestyle, and take preventive actions.

At the same time, we need to guard against unpredictable events. The most efficient way is to help one another, by pooling risk through an insurance scheme.

Today, we have MediShield Life, for all Singaporeans, to provide financial protection against large hospital bills, for life.

As we live longer, there is a higher chance that we will need long-term care towards the end of our lives. We need to prepare for this. The Ministry of Health has announced that it will be introducing the new CareShield Life from 2020, an enhancement of the current ElderShield scheme.

CareShield Life will provide lifetime coverage, with higher monthly payouts of at least \$600 a month for those who become severely disabled. This offsets the costs of long-term care for individuals and their families.

The Government will provide subsidies and premium support to ensure that CareShield Life premiums are affordable.

We will also offer participation incentives for existing cohorts, born in 1979 or earlier, to join CareShield Life, so that they are better protected should they need care in the future.



Patients at Toa Payoh Polyclinic. The Government will continue to strengthen support for the healthcare needs of Singaporeans, and help seniors stay active, healthy and engaged in their silver years. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

CareShield Life will offer much greater peace of mind for Singaporeans.

In addition, we will also launch ElderFund next year, to help severely disabled, lower-income Singaporeans who need additional financial support for long-term care. This includes those who might not be able to join CareShield Life, or have low MediSave balances.

The cost of long-term care is not only high, but will also increase as our population ages.

Last year, I earmarked \$2 billion for premium subsidies and other forms of support for Singaporeans. This year, I will set aside another \$3.1 billion.

The Government will put this \$5.1 billion into a new Long-Term Care Support Fund. This will help fund the CareShield Life subsidies and other long-term care support measures, such as ElderFund.

This is a significant commitment to help Singaporeans with their long-term care needs.

MERDEKA GENERATION PACKAGE

As the Prime Minister mentioned at the National Day Rally last year and the Tribute event earlier this month, we would also like to express our appreciation and support for our Merdeka Generation.

The Merdeka Generation is a resilient and independent generation. They played a critical role in our nation's development. The Merdeka Generation was among the earliest batches to serve National Service, build up our public services, and modernise our economy. They came together to forge our multi-cultural, multi-racial society.

The Merdeka Generation Package is a gesture of our nation's gratitude for their contributions and a way to show care for them in their silver years. It will provide them better peace of mind over future healthcare costs, while helping them to stay active and healthy.

The Merdeka Generation Package, or MGP, comprises five key benefits.

First, to support their active lifestyles, all Merdeka Generation (MG) seniors will receive a one-time \$100 top-up to their PAssion Silver cards.

- They can use this to pay for activities and facilities at the Community Clubs, entry to public swimming pools, public transport, and more.
- We will also work to introduce more active ageing opportunities for seniors, such as lifelong learning under the National Silver Academy and volunteerism under the Silver Volunteer Fund.

Second, we will provide a MediSave top-up of \$200 per year for five years. This will start from this year until 2023.

This will help them save more for their healthcare needs. This is on top of the GST Voucher – MediSave top-ups that eligible seniors aged 65 and above receive every year.

Third, MG seniors will receive additional subsidies for outpatient care, for life.

They will receive special CHAS subsidies, for common illnesses, chronic conditions, and dental procedures. The subsidy rates will

be higher than the CHAS Blue subsidies. All MG seniors will receive these enhanced subsidies, regardless of income, including those who do not have a CHAS card today.

At polyclinics and public Specialist Outpatient Clinics, they will receive 25 per cent off their subsidised bills. This is on top of the prevailing subsidies available.

Fourth, MG seniors will have additional MediShield Life premium subsidies, for life.

All MG seniors will receive subsidies for their premiums, starting from 5 per cent of their MediShield Life premiums, and increasing to 10 per cent after they reach 75 years of age.

This is on top of the means-tested subsidies that lower- to middle-income Singaporeans are already receiving.

Finally, we will provide an additional participation incentive of \$1,500 for MG seniors who join CareShield Life, when it becomes available for existing cohorts in 2021.

In addition to the \$2,500 previously announced, this means that all MG seniors who join CareShield Life will receive participation incentives totalling \$4,000 each. This will cover a significant portion of their premiums, and is on top of the regular means-tested premium subsidies.

I hope that this will encourage our MG seniors to join CareShield Life, to have peace of mind against the risk of high long-term care costs.

The Merdeka Generation Package will benefit close to 500,000 Singaporeans.

Those born in the 1950s and who obtained citizenship by 1996 will be eligible for the MGP. In addition, we will extend the MGP benefits to those born in 1949 or earlier, but missed out on the Pioneer Generation Package (PGP), if they obtained citizenship by 1996.

All eligible seniors will receive the MGP benefits, regardless of their income.

They will be notified by April 2019, and will receive their Merdeka Generation cards starting from June 2019.

The Merdeka Generation is aged 60 to 69 today. At the same time, Singaporeans' lifespans are increasing – our life expectancy is now 84.8 years. This is good news. It also means the Merdeka Generation will be able to enjoy the benefits for many years.

We estimate that the package will cost over \$8 billion, in current dollars, over the Merdeka Generation's lifetimes.

This Budget, I will set aside \$6.1 billion for a new Merdeka Generation Fund. With interest accumulated over time, this will cover the full projected costs of the Merdeka Generation Package.

This is a significant commitment by the Government. It is important that the Government of the day continues to monitor the patterns and cost of healthcare utilisation, and life expectancy over the next 30 years or more, so that the Government is able to meet this commitment.

To better prepare for increasing lifespans, we should encourage everyone to set aside something for the future.

To help Singaporeans who are younger than the Merdeka Generation with their future healthcare expenses, I will provide a MediSave top-up of \$100 a year, for the next five years, for Singaporeans who are:

- a. Aged 50 and above in 2019;
- b. And who do not receive the MGP or the PGP.

This is a generation who are even younger and healthier, and I hope that everyone will make the extra effort to stay active and healthy.

Our third social strategy is to foster a community of care and contribution, and build strong partnerships in our society.

The Government will continue to make every effort to care for our seniors, the disadvantaged, and vulnerable families.

The ComCare Long-Term Assistance scheme provides basic monthly cash assistance to those who are permanently unable to work and have little family support, to support their living expenses. Additional assistance is provided for households with additional needs, such as medical supplies.

We will raise the cash assistance rates for this scheme. For example, a two-person household, where both are on ComCare Long-Term Assistance, will receive an additional \$130 a month. This brings the total cash assistance to \$1,000 a month.

To help government pensioners who draw lower pensions, we will increase the Singapore Allowance and monthly pension ceiling by \$20 per month each, to \$320 and \$1,250 respectively. This will benefit about 9,300 pensioners.

COMMEMORATING OUR BICENTENNIAL

The spirit of giving back has a special meaning this year, as we commemorate the Singapore Bicentennial.

Therefore, I will launch two special initiatives in support of this.

First, I will set aside \$200 million for a Bicentennial Community Fund.

Today, we encourage individuals and corporates to give back to the community in various ways.

Donations to Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) qualify for a 250 per cent tax deduction.

Businesses also enjoy a 250 per cent tax deduction on qualifying expenditure when their employees volunteer or provide services to IPCs, under the Business and IPC Partnership Scheme.

The new Bicentennial Community Fund will provide dollar-for-dollar matching for donations made to IPCs in FY2019.

With this, we hope to further encourage more Singaporeans, including younger Singaporeans, to embrace the spirit of giving back.

At the same time, we are encouraging IPCs to reach out to more donors. The fund will be designed to ensure a good distribution of support for all donations to IPCs which do not currently receive government matching, and to increase the impact of the good work they are doing.

We have also enhanced our one-stop platform, Giving.sg, to better match donors and volunteers with meaningful causes.

This platform provides charities with an easy and secure way to

establish an online presence, and receive donations digitally.

Donors, too, can quickly navigate and find a worthy cause that matches their passion and commitment, and start on their giving journey.

Second, I will introduce a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus.

From time to time, when our finances allow, we share the surpluses with Singaporeans, and provide more help to those with specific needs.

With this Bonus, I hope that all Singaporeans, young and old, will join us to commemorate this significant moment in Singapore's history.

The Bicentennial Bonus has several components:

For lower-income Singaporeans, I will provide additional help with their daily living expenses. I will provide up to \$300 through a GST Voucher – Cash (Bicentennial Payment). This will benefit 1.4 million Singaporeans.

In addition, lower-income workers who received WIS payments will get a Workfare Bicentennial Bonus. They will receive an additional 10 per cent of their WIS payment for work done in 2018, with a minimum payment of \$100. This will be given in cash.

I will provide a 50 per cent Personal Income Tax Rebate, subject to a cap of \$200, for the Year of Assessment 2019. I have set the cap at \$200 so that the benefits go mostly to middle-income earners.

For parents with school-going children, we will provide additional support for their children's education.

Each year, the Government contributes to the Edusave accounts of all Singaporean students at primary and secondary school levels. This helps to pay for school enrichment activities, to better develop students holistically.

This year, we will provide a \$150 top-up to their Edusave accounts. This is on top of the annual Edusave contributions that they already receive from the Government.

In addition, Singaporeans aged 17 to 20 will receive up to \$500 in their PostSecondary Education Accounts (PSEA). This will go towards helping parents to save for their children's tertiary education.

We will also provide additional support for older Singaporeans, who are near retirement. I will provide a CPF top-up of up to \$1,000 for eligible Singaporeans aged 50 to 64 years old in 2019, who have less than \$60,000 of retirement savings in their CPF accounts. This will be credited into the Special Account for members aged 50 to 54, and the Retirement Account for members aged 55 to 64.

About 300,000 Singaporeans will benefit from this CPF top-up. The majority of these recipients will be women. Many of them left the workforce early, and took up important roles as mothers, caregivers, or housewives. As a result, they had fewer years to build up their savings. This top-up is a way to recognise their contributions and to help them save more.

In addition to the CPF top-up, Singaporeans in the age group of 50 to 64 who qualify for Workfare will also benefit from the WIS enhancements. Most of those in the 60 to 64 age group will also receive the Merdeka Generation Package, while the rest will receive the five-year MediSave top-ups. These are all on top of the targeted benefits such as the GST Voucher.

Together, we hope that these measures will provide greater peace of mind for our older workers now and later in their silver years.

In addition to the special Bicentennial initiatives, we will provide another year of Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC) Rebate to HDB households.

Eligible Singaporean households will receive S&CC rebates of between one and a half, and three and a half (1.5 to 3.5) months. This will cost \$132 million and benefit about 930,000 households.

Finally, I will top up the Public Transport Fund by \$10 million, to continue helping commuters in need with their transport expenses, such as through Public Transport Vouchers for lower-income families.

The Government keeps a close watch on the cost of living.

Over the years, we have done much to alleviate cost pressures – whether in healthcare, education, or day-to-day expenses. Good macro-economic management has enabled us to keep inflation low, while the Singapore dollar has been strengthening over time. Over and above these favourable conditions, this Budget continues to provide significant support for Singaporeans, especially our seniors and lower-income

households.

Budget 2019 supports the Government's long-term strategy to build a caring and inclusive society. This is our continued effort to improve the lives of our people and our future generations.

A GLOBAL CITY AND HOME FOR ALL

Infrastructure takes time to build, but once built, can serve us for a long time. We must take a long view for our development plans. The upcoming URA Master Plan 2019 will guide our urban development over a 10- to 15-year time frame.

As our home, and a global node, our city has to be well-connected within and with the world.

Within Singapore, we now have about 230km of MRT lines. This will rise to about 360km in the 2030s when major MRT projects such as the Cross Island Line are completed.

To enhance our global connectivity, we are increasing the capacities of our airport and sea port. This will strengthen our role as a key node within Asia and to the world.

ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL

Beyond the next decade, we must also plan for climate change.

Climate change and rising sea levels threaten our very existence. As a low-lying island nation, there is nowhere to hide when sea levels rise. Other small island nations like the Maldives are already facing risk of flooding, with severe implications.

The Government is studying the implications carefully and will come up with measures to prepare ourselves adequately. Our Climate Action Plan, which was launched in 2016, sets out the strategy for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, especially on our infrastructure.

In line with the Action Plan, low-lying roads near coastal areas have been raised. Changi Airport Terminal 5 will also be built at 5.5 metres above mean sea level. The use of polders and dikes is already being piloted on Pulau Tekong. These will help us to learn how to deal with rising sea levels.

To protect ourselves against climate change and rising sea levels, we will have to invest more. Together with existing infrastructure needs, our total bill for infrastructure will increase significantly.

Tackling climate change requires global cooperation. Singapore is committed to doing our part.

The carbon tax will be applied on this year's emissions. This is an important signal to companies and households to reduce emissions and adopt energy-efficient practices.

As individuals, we too must change our way of life and work towards becoming a zero waste nation, by adopting the 3Rs: reducing consumption, reusing, and recycling. The Zero Waste Masterplan will be launched in the second half of this year.

Among other issues, it will look at better management of food waste, e-waste, and packaging waste including plastics.

We have also taken steps to discourage diesel consumption.

To continue the restructuring of diesel taxes, I will raise the excise duty for diesel by \$0.10 per litre, to \$0.20 per litre. This takes immediate effect.

At the same time, I will permanently reduce the annual Special Tax on diesel taxis by \$850.

I strongly urge taxi companies to pass on the savings to their drivers, like they did in 2017 – this will on average reduce the impact of the duty increase by more than three-quarters for taxis. I will also permanently reduce the Special Tax on diesel cars by \$100. This will on average reduce the impact by more than half.

To help businesses adjust, I will provide a 100 per cent road tax rebate for one year, and partial road tax rebate for another two years, for commercial diesel vehicles. I will also provide, over three years, additional cash rebates of up to \$3,200 for diesel buses ferrying school children.

A FISCALLY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Singapore's ability to plan for the long term is our strategic advantage.

But our best-laid plans to develop our people and transform our city can only be realised with a sound fiscal plan.

Our fiscal discipline and prudence gave us the resources to respond decisively to unexpected challenges, such as the 2008 global financial crisis. We must not take this for granted.

While our nation's needs are growing significantly, we must continue to take a disciplined and prudent approach.



Election campaign posters in Bangkok earlier this month. The possibility of unrest if the electorate feels it is being denied free and fair elections poses a key risk to Thailand's economic outlook, said Capital Economics. Growth remains heavily reliant on exports in the face of the US-Sino trade war, while a recovery in private consumption has been constrained by high household debt. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Thai economy picks up in Q4 but polls could impact 2019 pace

Last year's growth of 4.1% highest since 2012; Q4 results boosted by local demand, tourism arrivals

BANGKOK • Thailand's economy grew at its best pace in six years last year, with the fourth quarter beating expectations on higher domestic demand and record tourism arrivals.

The state planning agency yesterday cut its forecast for this year's exports, the main growth driver, but maintained the 3.5 to 4.5 per cent economic growth projection it made last November.

Growth data released yesterday is the last before Thailand holds an election on March 24 – the first since a 2014 military coup – that might cause political uncertainty.

Mr Kobsideh Silpachai, head of capital markets research at Kasikornbank, said: "It is too early... to revise forecasts given the plethora of variables that can impact estimates, that is, Sino-US trade ten-

sions, Brexit and Thai general elections and what economic and social policies will be pursued."

In October-December, South-east Asia's second-largest economy grew 3.7 per cent, compared with a Reuters poll forecast of 3.6 per cent, and the July-September quarter's revised 3.2 per cent, National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) data showed.

The agency put last year's growth at 4.1 per cent, the highest since 2012. Growth for 2017 was revised to 4 per cent, from 3.9 per cent.

Capital Economics, which forecasts 3 per cent growth for this year, said: "GDP (gross domestic product) growth in Thailand picked up in Q4, but it is likely to struggle for momentum in the quarters ahead due to weaker external demand."

"The key risk to the outlook is the possibility of unrest if the electorate feels it is being denied free and fair elections, expected to be held on March 24."

The government lowered this year's export growth outlook to 4.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent. Thai-

POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

GDP (gross domestic product) growth in Thailand picked up in Q4, but it is likely to struggle for momentum in the quarters ahead due to weaker external demand. The key risk to the outlook is the possibility of unrest if the electorate feels it is being denied free and fair elections, expected to be held on March 24.



CAPITAL ECONOMICS, which forecasts 3 per cent growth for Thailand this year.

land's exports, worth about two-thirds of the economy, increased 7.7 per cent last year, slowing from 2017's rise of about 10 per cent.

Headline growth in Thailand's trade-driven economy has picked up in recent years on global economic recovery, but it is still not firing on all cylinders, with substantial excess industrial capacity.

Growth remains heavily reliant on exports in the face of the US-Sino trade war, while a recovery in private consumption has been constrained by high household debt.

Annual exports in the December quarter rose at a slower pace of 2.3 per cent, while private consumption increased 5.3 per cent from a year earlier, and private investment was up 5.5 per cent. Public investment contracted 0.1 per cent, NESDC data showed.

In the last three months of last year, tourist arrivals rose 4.3 per cent from a year earlier, up from 1.9 per cent the previous quarter, as the number of Chinese visitors – reduced by a July boat accident that killed 47 – rebounded. REUTERS

Carousell cuts fraud rate by 44% over past year

Carousell yesterday said the company's fraud rate has declined by 44 per cent over the past 12 months, and announced it will launch two product features later this week.

By the fourth quarter of last year, the online marketplace had a fraud rate of 0.031 per cent, meaning about three in 10,000 transactions were fraudulent.

This was achieved via improvements to product and engineering, investment in human resources, and a collaboration with the authorities to increase consumer education, Carousell said.

Last July, the firm launched its new integrated payment system CarouPay to offer easier and safer options to arrange a deal.

The company said: "As an escrow service, funds will be held by Carousell and released only after successful delivery of an item."

"In addition, a feature enhancement, CarouPay Protection, was made in the last quarter of 2018 to provide users with the function of freezing funds in the event of a dispute, until a resolution is met."

It added that it has been employing technology such as artificial intelligence as its first line of defence in combating fraud at scale.

"In order to further improve detection and prevent scams, Carousell has increased its investment in machine learning by five times since last year and partnered Sift, a fraud detection solution."

According to the company, Sift combines big data and machine learning to spot patterns and detect malicious online content such as fake accounts, payment fraud, account takeover and content abuse to streamline and prevent fraudulent activities.

Following Sift's introduction to the platform, an average of one in two, or 53 per cent, of all fraudulent activity in the fourth quarter was detected and taken down automatically, up from an average of 16 per cent in the third quarter, Carousell said.

Besides expanding its team with the hiring of former Singapore Press Holdings deputy marketing chief Tan Su Lin as its vice-president of operations, as well as payments fraud specialist Evelyn Zhou, the company has doubled the size of its content moderators to enhance coverage and speed.

As a result, the percentage of user reports that are manually reviewed under an hour has increased from 26 per cent in July last year to 75 per cent in December, it said.

Separately, Carousell also announced it would be launching two product features within the next few days.

They are a star-rating system that allows users to rate various aspects of a deal based on their experiences, and digital fingerprint technology to tighten the account creation process to prevent bad actors from returning to the platform, said the company.

53%

Percentage of fraudulent activity in the fourth quarter that was detected and taken down automatically, following the introduction of fraud detection solution Sift to the platform.

SilkAir launching non-stop flights to Busan in May

SilkAir, the regional wing of Singapore Airlines (SIA), said yesterday it will launch non-stop flights between Singapore and Busan, starting from May 1.

The airline will have four weekly flights to Busan, which is the first South Korean city in its network.

SilkAir said it will be the first airline to operate scheduled flights between Singapore and Busan.

The new service will be operated with the Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft, which features both business- and economy-class cabins.

Customers will enjoy a "full-service experience" on a board, said SilkAir. This includes in-flight meals and in-flight entertainment, complimentary baggage allowance and through check-in if they are connecting to or from another SilkAir or SIA point via Singapore.

SilkAir chief executive Foo Chai Woo said: "For Koreans travelling from Busan, the new route will offer greater access and connectivity with the SilkAir and Singapore Airlines network in the Asia-Pacific and beyond."

Located on the south-eastern tip of the Korean peninsula, Busan is the country's second-largest city and a tourist destination touted as the summer capital of South Korea.

SilkAir said recently it would work with Irish aircraft seat-maker Thompson Aero Seating to upgrade its cabins, ahead of a merger with SIA. The works, which start from May 2020, are for its Boeing 737 MAX 8 fleet, which will feature new lie-flat, business-class seats in a forward-facing staggered layout.

SilkAir currently has five 737 MAX 8s, with another 32 on order.



SilkAir's Singapore-Busan route will be operated with the Boeing 737 MAX 8, which features business- and economy-class cabins. The airline has five of the aircraft, with another 32 on order. PHOTO: SILKAIR

SME

Five imperatives for change every business should consider

Today in **THE BUSINESS TIMES**

A publication of **SPH**

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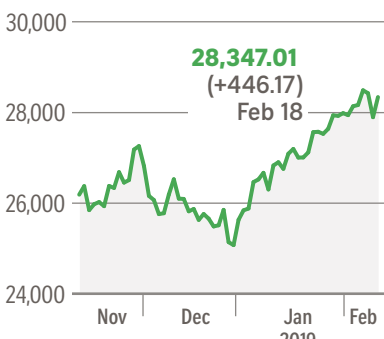
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BullsAndBears

Banks lead the way as STI climbs 0.8%

Regional markets also rise on signs of thawing US-China ties after trade talks

Navin Sregantan

No prizes for guessing that most attention was on the Budget, but investors still managed to marshal their forces to lead the market up.

The Straits Times Index (STI) added 26.23 points, or 0.81 per cent, at 3,265.97 and is now 6.4 per cent ahead since the start of the year. Turnover was 1.47 billion shares worth \$929.84 million with gainers outpacing losers 214 to 176.

Markets in the region also started the week with broad gains on the back of thawing United States-China relations following trade talks in Beijing that had sent Wall Street higher last Friday.

Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Malaysia and South Korea all ended the day higher. Shanghai, the market with the most to gain, shot up 2.7 per cent.

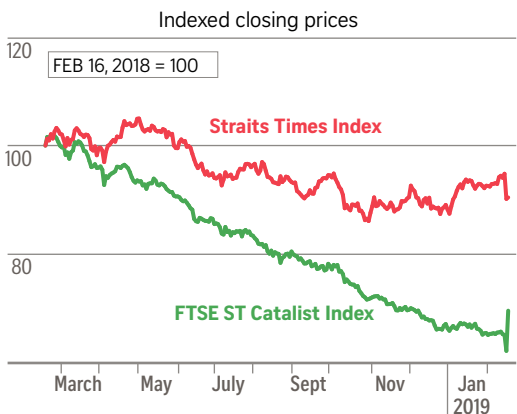
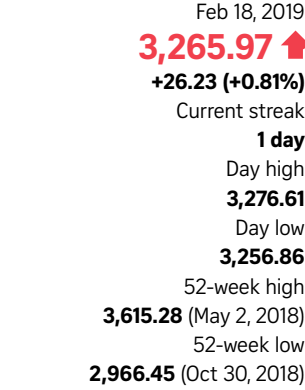
The most active here was Thomson Medical, which added 2.56 per cent at eight cents with 70.4 million shares changing hands.

ThaiBev was the STI's most traded, closing up 0.61 per cent at 82 cents on trade of 37.6 million.

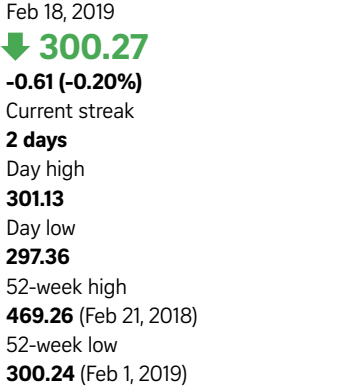
CMC Markets analyst Margaret Yang said the counter's performance was likely a result of profit-taking activities after closing with strong gains last Friday.

The STI's performance yesterday

Straits Times Index



FTSE ST Catalyst Index



Indexed closing prices



FTSE ST All-Share Index



had a good deal to do with Singapore's bellwether banking stocks.

DBS, which posted full-year earnings yesterday, added 1.65 per cent to \$25.20.

Jefferies Singapore equity analyst Krishna Guha said the bank's re-

sults read well for its peers despite lower expectations. The brokerage maintains a "buy" call on DBS with a target price of \$28.20.

OCBC Bank added 1.65 per cent to \$11.71, while United Overseas Bank put on 0.74 per cent to \$25.87.

"Bank shares evidently had the trade hopes boost to glean as well," said IG market strategist Pan Jingyi.

Meanwhile, Singapore Airlines gained 1.95 per cent to \$9.95 following a robust fourth quarter.

There was some gloom as well with numbers out pointing to a weak showing for Singapore's non-oil domestic exports.

Ms Nur Raisah Rasid at JPMorgan said the figures highlighted lingering tech export weakness.

It meant a mixed bag for export-oriented tech companies: Venture Corp closed 0.68 per cent higher at \$16.21, but UMS Holdings dropped 1.5 per cent to 66 cents.

Best World plunged 16.6 per cent to \$2.71 early in the session before the skincare maker and distributor requested a trading halt at 11.23am pending an announcement. It had soared 171 per cent over the past 12 months before yesterday's decline.

navinsre@sph.com.sg

Mixed martial arts' One Championship names new group president



Prior to the appointment, Mr Teh Hua Fung was CFO and chairman of Greater China at One Championship.

Singapore-based mixed martial arts organisation, One Championship, has promoted Mr Teh Hua Fung to group president, it announced yesterday.

Prior to the appointment, Mr Teh was chief financial officer and chairman of Greater China at One Championship, where he was responsible for various aspects of operations including finance, human resources, corporate development, media rights and digital partnerships.

He also led key strategic projects globally and oversaw the company's Greater China business, the statement said.

Before One Championship, he was a principal at global private equity firm TPG Capital, where he was a senior member of the South-east Asia investment team. He also served on TPG's China and US teams.

A taekwondo black-belt holder, Mr Teh graduated from Harvard Business School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was a member of the men's varsity basketball team. He is also a member of The Forum of Young Global Leaders at the World Economic Forum.

Mr Chatrri Sityodtong, chairman and chief executive officer of One Championship, said: "Hua Fung has helped One Championship enormously across multiple departments with his leadership, strategic thinking and execution."

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED/SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
279	245	Ascendas Reit	277	+1	10299	5.8	1.4
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	188	+1	12515	4.6	1
380	298	Capitaland	334	-2	7260	3.6	0.6
243	196	CapitaMall Trust	240	+1	4601	4.8	1.2
1359	780	CityDev	949	+8	1380	1.9	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	241cd	+1	5761	4.4	2
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2520cd	+41	5147	4.8	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US897	-1	80	2.3	-
133	85.5	Genting Sing	110	+2	24798	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25.5	-0.5	11772	3.2	0.6
37	10.23	HPH Trust USD	US25.5cd	+0.5	8653	10.3	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US705	-6	664	2.8	0.3
716	1099	JMH USD	US7030	-21	245	2.3	0.8
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3920	+57	129	0.8	0.4
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3673	+63	315	3.1	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp	614cd	+6	1614	4.9	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1171	+19	3121	3.2	1.2
564	455	SATS	510	+4	1629	3.5	3.5
786	672	SGX	779	unch	1563	3.9	0.7
1184	914	SIA	995	+19	1959	4	1
292	231	SPH	251	+3	2272	5.2	1.1
378	321	ST Engineering	374	+3	2340	4	5.5
241	243	Sembcorp Ind	257	unch	1506	1.9	0.7
358	283	Singtel	300	+1	11420	6.8	1.7
378	321	ST Engineering	374	+3	2340	4	5.5
241	243	Sembcorp Ind	257	unch	1506	1.9	0.7
358	283	Singtel	300	+1	11420	6.8	1.7
88	57.5	ThaiBev	82	+0.5	37615	0.8	4
3037	2380	UOB	2587	+19	1609	3.9	1.2
898	591	UOL	665	+5	627	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1621	+11	1060	3.7	2.1
337	297	Wilmar Intl	336	+6	5259	3	1
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	140	unch	10600	3.2	1

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED/SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
279	245	Ascendas Reit	277	+1	10299	5.8	1.4
120	105	Ascott Reit	114	+1	2000	6.3	1
74.5	59	Bumitama Agri	68	unch	125	1.1	1.6
178	143	CDL HTrust	158	unch	2093	-	1
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	188	+1	12515	4.6	1
380	298	Capitaland	334	-2	7260	3.6	0.7
243	196	CapitaMall Trust	240	+1	4601	4.8	1.2
164	133	CapitaStar China Tr	144	+1	1966	7.1	0.9
1359	780	CityDev	949	+8	1380	1.9	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	241cd	+1	5761	4.4	2
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2520cd	+41	5147	4.8	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US897	-1	80	2.3	-
73.5	59	Far East HTrust	65.5cd	+1.5	4514	-	0.7
183	159	First Resources	169	-3	234	4	2.2
231	212	Fraser's Cpt Tr	228	unch	909	5.3	109.6
112	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	111	unch	1792	6.2	1.2
133	85.5	Genting Sing	110	+2	24798	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25.5	-0.5	11772	3.2	0.6
224	167	GuocoLand Ltd	184	-2	126	3.8	0.6
37	23	HPH Trust USD	US25.5cd	+0.5	8653	10.3	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US705	-6	664	2.8	0.3
716	1099	JMH USD	US7030	-21	245	2.3	0.8
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3920	+57	129	0.8	0.4
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3673	+63	315	3.1	1.8
58	44.5	Keppel Infra Tr	50.5	unch	4673	7.4	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp	614cd	+6	1614	4.9	1
124	108	Keppel Reit	124	+2	10912	4.5	0.9
151	151	Man Oriental USD	205cd	+1	1008	5.5	3.6
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US207	unch	108	1.4	1.5
186	152	Mapletree Com Tr	178	-1	5267	5.1	1.2
206	184	Mapletree Ind Tr	199xd	unch	4747	5.9	1.3
140	118	Mapletree Log Tr	139	unch	17083	5.5	1.2
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr	125	unch	6736	6	0.9
83	73	NetLink NBN Tr	80	-0.5	2097	-	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1171	+19	3121	3.2	1.2
199	136	OUE	156	-2	210	1.9	1.4
87	64.5	OUE HTrust	71.5	unch	1090	-	1
250	157	Olam Intl	194	+1	2070	3.9	1
59	28	Oxley	32	unch	5159	4.7	0.9
291	256	ParkwayLife Reit	280	unch	717	4.6	1.5
121	98	Raffles Medical	111	unch	641	2	2.6
564	455	SATS	510	+4	1629	3.5	3.5
786	672	SGX	779	unch	1563	3.9	0.7
1184	914	SIA	995	+19	1959	4	1
336	220	SIA Engineering	231	-1	549	5.6	1.7
292	231	SPH	251	+3	2272	5.2	1.1
103	98	SPHREIT	102	unch	1109	5.4	1.1
378	321	ST Engineering	374	+3	2340	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind	257	unch	1506	1.9	0.7
269	149	Sembcorp Marine	159	-1	3901	1.3	1.4
58	39	Silverlake Axis	55cd	+0.5	2909	5.5	8
144	88.5	SingPost	97.5	+2	4257	3.6	1.3
358	283	Singtel	300	+1	11420	6.8	1.7
263	158	StarHub	161	-6	8757	9.9	5
74	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	69	-0.5	2356	6.6	0.8
199	163	Suntie Reit	191	+1	5064	5.2	0.9
88	57.5	ThaiBev	82	+0.5	37615	0.8	4
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical	8	+0.2	70422	-	2.9
3037	2380	UOB	2587	+19	1609	3.9	1.2
898	591	UOL	665	+5	627	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1621	+11	1060	3.7	2.1
337	297	Wilmar Intl	336	+6	5259	3	1
226	183	Wing Tai	204	unch	645	3.9	0.5
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	140	unch	10600	3.2	1
182	116	Yanlord Land	140	unch	3278	4.9	0.6

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	138	unch	119	7.5	1
68.5	48	Accordia Golf Tr	56.5	-0.5	221	6.8	0.6
86.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	85	unch	501	-	0.9
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	113	+1	1948	5.4	1.3
58	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	13.2	unch	2793	49.2	0.2
64	48	Banyan Tree	59	unch	3820	1.7	0.8
333	115	Best World	271	-54	8694	1.5	9.7
85.5	76	Boustead	80	-1	39	3.8	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	88	unch	110	8	2.3
632	521	Bukit Sembawang	565	-3	29	3.2	1.1
87	65.5	Cache Log Trust	71.5	unch	1141	8.3	1.1
52	39.5	Centurion	40.5	unch	40	6.2	0.7
166	104	China Aviation	126	unch	558	3.6	1.1
46	29.5	China Everbright	34	+0.5	2810	14	0.7
165	90.5	China Sunshine	129	-1	654	2.3	1.4
103	64	Chip Eng Seng	70	-0.5	2134	5.7	0.6
53.5	31.5	Cosco	35.5	unch	2677	-	1.5
700	302	Delong	554	-19	8	-	0.5
27.5	17.5	Duty Free Intl	19.5	-0.5	201	9.5	1.2
77	67.5	EC World Reit	74.5	+0.5	208	8.1	0.9
59	47	ESR-REIT	53.5	unch	4208	7.2	1.1
140	92	First Reit	105	unch	760	8.2	1
152	135	Fraser's Com Tr	149	unch	1884	6.4	1
80	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	73	unch	260	-	1
25.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	19.1	-0.3	638	5.2	1.1
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	79	-0.5	698	2.9	2.4
67.5	52	Health Mgt Intl	57cd	unch	265	0.6	5.4
279	73	Hi-P Intl	99	-1	4122	25.3	1.5
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	270	+1	170	4.8	0.7
80.5	71	IREIT Global	76	unch	124	7.8	1.1
37	18.3	Indofood Agri	21.5	unch	152	-	0.3
84	43	Japfa	79.5	+0.5	2334	0.6	1.5
76.5	49	KSH	51	-2	208	4.3	0.9
85	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	66	-0.5	474	9.4	0.6
149	128	Keppel DC Reit	145	unch	2966	5	1.4
190	132	Keppel T&T	189	+1	745	-	1.2
11.9	7	KrisEnergy	8	unch	6095	-	1
71	44.5	Lian Beng	49.5	+0.5	541	4.5	0.4
40.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	23.5	unch	2296	14.6	0.9
53	28	MM2 Asia	29	+0.5	873	-	1.6
95	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	84xd	-3	1655	6.6	0.7
120	95	Metro	99	unch	99	5.1	0.6
21	5	Noble	8.1	susp	-	-	-
63.4	45	OUE Com Reit	50	unch	678	7	0.7
66	54	PEC	56.5	-	-	3.5	0.6
39.5	17	POSH	18.3	-	-	-	0.5
64.5	44.5	Q&M Dental	47	-1	28	3.4	3.4
110	55.5	QAF Ltd	71	unch	27	7	0.8
124	96	Riverstone	113	unch	11	2	3.7
54.5	22	SIIC Environment	36.5	+1	822	-	0.6
45	38.5	Sabana Reit	42.5	unch	1402	7.5	0.7
119	91	Sheng Siong	108	unch	348	3.1	6
25.5	3.3	Sino Granddang	6	-0.2	1201	-	0.1
69	56	SoilbuildBizReit	60.5	+0.5	362	8.7	1
129	80.5	Tianjin ZX USD	91	+0.5	443	-	0.7
46.5	32.5	Tuan Sing	38cd	-0.5	214	2.4	0.4
136	54	UMS	66	-1	2612	7.6	1.6
112	58.5	Valuetronics	69	unch	2648	6.6	1.5
15	8.3	Ying Li Intl	121	-0.2	3023	-	0.3
48.5	24	Yoma Strategic	33.5	-1	2126	0.7	0.9
33	16.1	Yongnam	17.2	-0.1	420	-	0.3

DBS Q4 net profit up 10% on loans

\$1.32b earnings just miss forecast; turmoil hits trading, wealth ops

DBS Group Holdings relied on lending to boost its fourth-quarter profit as financial market turbulence hit its trading, wealth and investment banking operations.

Net profit climbed 10 per cent to \$1.32 billion in the three months ended Dec 31, slightly missing the \$1.34 billion average estimate of analysts surveyed.

Net interest margin gained nine basis points from a year earlier to 1.87 per cent, but only one basis point from the previous quarter, while loans expanded 7 per cent to \$345 billion.

DBS is giving a final dividend of 60 cents per share, bringing the full-year payout to \$1.20 per share. This is lower than last year's total

payout of \$1.43, which was boosted by a special dividend of 50 cents.

DBS' Treasury Markets unit saw a pre-tax loss of \$54 million because of lower contributions from equity and credit activities. The loss was bigger than the \$50 million posted in the second quarter, which chief executive officer Piyush Gupta described at the time as the worst since he joined the bank a decade ago.

Wealth management income shrank 4 per cent to \$218 million, the lowest in two years.

For the full year, net profit rose 28 per cent to a record \$5.63 billion on higher interest rates. Net interest income rose 15 per cent to \$8.96 billion, while loans grew 6 per cent to \$345 billion.

The loan pipeline looks good this year, Mr Gupta said in a Bloomberg Television interview yesterday. While the outlook for interest rates is the biggest risk for DBS this year,



DBS expects to ink a deal this year on a China securities business partnership, says chief executive Piyush Gupta.

net interest margins will continue to widen even after the US Federal Reserve signalled a pause in its monetary tightening, Mr Gupta said. Any Fed policy reversal, however, would be a "headwind", he added.

DBS shares rose yesterday as investors bet it would continue to benefit from loan growth and higher interest rates even as risks linger from the US-China trade dispute.

"Margin picked up, loan growth wasn't badly affected by trade wars, credit quality remained stable," said Sanford C. Bernstein analyst Kevin Kwek. "That being said, trade war

challenges remain, so until that is resolved in some fashion, markets won't be pricing in a full recovery."

DBS shares closed 1.65 per cent higher at \$25.20, outperforming the broader market, which was up 0.81 per cent. Shares of OCBC Bank and United Overseas Bank, which are due to report earnings on Friday, rose 1.65 per cent and 0.74 per cent respectively.

Separately, DBS is in discussions on forming a China securities business partnership and expects to ink a deal this year, Mr Gupta said. Regulatory clearances could take longer, he added.

"We are actively talking to people about trying to put together something on the securities front" focusing on the Greater Bay area, he said, adding that the bank will continue to support Chinese companies that are expanding abroad.

BLOOMBERG, THE BUSINESS TIMES



Century Square is one of the six retail malls in Singapore owned and managed by PGIM Real Estate Asia Retail Fund. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Frasers Property buying 17.8% stake in S'pore retail mall fund for \$356m

Frasers Property has inked a conditional agreement to acquire a 17.8 per cent stake in Singapore's largest non-listed retail mall fund for about \$356.4 million.

The fund, PGIM Real Estate Asia Retail Fund (PGIM Real Estate), owns and manages six retail malls in Singapore – namely Tiong Bahru Plaza, White Sands, Liang Court, Hougang Mall, Century Square and Tampines 1 – as well as office property Central Plaza.

The fund is the property investment vehicle of PGIM, the global investment management arm of New York Stock Exchange-listed Prudential Financial.

Frasers Property said its subsidiary, Frasers Property Crystal, has entered into a conditional agreement with a shareholder of PGIM Real Estate to purchase 94,013

shares, representing a 17.8265 per cent stake in the company.

The final price of the acquisition is subject to determination of the dividend amount payable in respect of the sale shares for the fourth quarter of last year.

As of Dec 31, the book value and net asset value of the sale shares amounted to \$355.5 million, which includes the fourth-quarter 2018 dividend.

\$4.96b

Frasers Property's market capitalisation as of last Friday.

Frasers Property intends to finance the acquisition via internal funds or external borrowings, or a combination of both, it said.

Among other things, completion of the acquisition is conditional upon consent from the Bermuda Monetary Authority, and board approval from PGIM Real Estate.

Frasers Property said the acquisition is in line with its strategy to grow recurring income sources in one of its key asset classes, as PGIM Real Estate's assets consist primarily of suburban retail properties.

It added that the deal will enhance the group's portfolio of investment properties, as suburban retail is an asset class that has demonstrated "resilience across property cycles".

As of last Friday, Frasers Property had a market cap of \$4.96 billion.

Interbank currency rates

Feb 18				
Currencies	Against \$S Bid	Against \$S Offer	Against \$US Bid	Against \$US Offer
S\$/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9689	0.9697	0.7146	0.7151
Canadian dollar	10239	10245	0.7555	0.7552
Euro	15327	15331	1.1305	1.1306
NZ dollar	0.9303	0.9312	0.6862	0.6867
Sterling pound	17494	17499	1.2903	1.2905
US dollar	13558	13560	-	-
US\$/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	20.0319	20.0384	14.7750	14.7776
Danish kroner	20.5406	20.5455	15.1501	15.1515
Hong Kong dollar	1728	1728	12.7418	12.7423
Indian Rupee	190	190	1.3995	1.3997
Indonesia rupiah	0.0096	0.0096	0.0071	0.0071
Japanese yen	12262	12267	0.9844	0.9846
Korean won	0.1204	0.1204	0.0888	0.0888
Malaysian ringgit	3.19	3.24	24.4798	24.5596
New Taiwan dollar	4.0828	4.3990	3.2440	3.2441
Norwegian krone	15.7130	15.7254	11.5895	11.5969
Philippine peso	2.5899	2.5912	1.9102	1.9109
Saudi riyal	36.1498	36.1581	26.6631	26.6652
Swedish krona	14.6285	14.6354	10.7896	10.7931
Swiss franc	135.0533	135.0867	99.6115	99.6214
Thai Baht	4.3399	4.3434	3.2010	3.2031
Source: ODBC				

OBITUARIES

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1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to
the family of our beloved General Manager



HENG KIM TIANG
Departed on 18 February 2019

In loving memory of our General Manager, Heng Kim Tiang.
Fondly remembered by colleagues and staff in our company.
You will be sadly missed

From

The Management & Staff of

Wilhelm SEA Pte Ltd

Wilhelm Technologies Sdn Bhd

Helms Oil Tools Manufacturing (Shanghai) Co. Ltd

2nd Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory of
Lee Seok Hwee
Departed on 19 February 2017

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Deeply missed and always remembered by
Husband: Chuah Yet Lian
All relatives, friends and loved ones.

Memory wanders
as shadows fall
Back to the days
of happiness,
Days beyond recall.
A vision comes
before us,
So calm, so dear,
so sweet,
Of her lips now silent
And whose lids are
closed in sleep.



16th ANNIVERSARY
IN LOVING MEMORY OF



MOTI MELWANI
Departed peacefully on 19 Feb. 2003

Deeply missed & always remembered by:
Loving Wife: **Shobha Melwani**
Parents: **B.H. Melwani**
Laj Melwani (deceased)

Daughters: **Tara Melwani**
Shabnam Melwani
Resham Melwani
Sons-in-law: **Suraj Melwani**
Grandsons: **Zachary Melwani Reis**
Luca Melwani Reis
Aditya Melwani

FAMILY MEMBERS, RELATIVES, FRIENDS
AND MANAGEMENT & STAFF OF
JAY GEE MELWANI GROUP

"... God himself will be with them and be their God. He will
wipe every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more..."
Rev 21:3-4



Francis Lim Juay Khoon

Age: 69

Was called home to be with the Lord on 18 February 2019.
Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: **Nina Siow Yam Neo**

Daughters: **Liza Lin He**
Clare Lin Ying
Marian Lin Sheng
Rita Marie Lin En
Judith Lin Xiu
Sons-in-law: **Zennon Kapron**
Ho Tzyy Yih

Grandson: **Quinn Xavier Kapron**

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Church of Our Lady of Lourdes,
Notredame Room, 50 Ophir Road, Singapore 188690.
Nightly prayers will be held at 8.45pm.
Cortege leaves on Friday 22 February 2019 at 2.45pm
for Funeral Mass at Church of Christ the King,
2221 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 8, Singapore 569809 at 3.30pm.
thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 3
for cremation at 5.15pm.

Share
the message of
farewell with
loved ones & friends



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SMS or social media.

ST Classifieds



TAN TENG HUAT
Departed on 19 February 2018

Missed and remembered always.

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SPORT

26

AGE OF RETIRING SWIMMER ROANNE HO,
S'PORE'S ASIAD SILVER MEDALLIST C11

RIDHWAN FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Ringstar Management founder Scott O'Farrell (right) wrote on Facebook that he received "numerous death threats" from a Russian man. ST FILE PHOTO



Boxer's manager and Ringstar CEO O'Farrell may quit promotion owing to 'death threats'

Sazali Abdul Aziz

Singapore's top professional boxer Muhamad Ridhwan has hit another bump on the road to his World Boxing Council (WBC) silver featherweight title bout, after Scott O'Farrell, chief executive officer of fight promoters Ringstar, said yesterday he could resign.

In a Facebook post yesterday morning which was later taken down, O'Farrell said he decided to resign after he received "numerous death threats" from a Russian man he identified only as "Sasha".

When contacted by The Straits Times, O'Farrell repeated the claim that he felt his life was at threat from the Russian man, and added he would seek legal recourse.

Asked to clarify if he had resigned

from Ringstar, the Briton said he had not, but would sit with the company's board to discuss his future. He declined further comment.

According to Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority records, O'Farrell is one of four shareholders in Ringstar and owns 20 per cent of the company.

Ridhwan, who spent the last six weeks at a training camp in Manila run by Filipino International Boxing Federation (IBF) super flyweight world champion Jerwin Ancajas, returned to Singapore last night and said he was caught unaware by the development.

"What Scott posted is a shock, but that's the reality," said the 31-year-old Singaporean, who is the WBC's 26th-ranked featherweight boxer.

"Pro boxing is a tough business, in and out of the ring."

CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN

There is a lot of noise, but I spoke to coach Joven and Jerwin and they told me this is normal in the sport. I cannot control a lot of things, but what I can is my own performance in my upcoming fight.



MUHAMAD RIDHWAN, Singapore's top professional boxer, on staying focused despite the uncertainty surrounding his future.

Ridhwan will fly back to the Philippines on March 3, where he will prepare for an upcoming bout against a yet-unnamed opponent in an event in Manila co-promoted by Ringstar and Manny Pacquiao's MP Promotions, on March 23.

He said Joven Jimenez, who trains him and Ancajas, had assured him the fight would go on as planned, despite the recent turn of events.

"There is a lot of noise, but I spoke to coach Joven and Jerwin and they told me this is normal in the sport," added Ridhwan.

"I cannot control a lot of things, but what I can is my own performance in my upcoming fight."

"The top IBF officials are going to be there (on March 23) so I need to put on a good performance."

Less than two weeks ago, Ringstar had announced a postponement of Ridhwan's WBC silver title bout with Namibian Paulus Ambunda scheduled for March 29.

O'Farrell said then that he said his company could not deliver the standard of show it wanted due to "certain developments", which he declined to go into detail.

Sources told ST that Ringstar was facing cash-flow problems, but O'Farrell denied any financial issues.

Ridhwan, who turned professional in February 2016, had also announced a shock retirement on social media last month, but made a U-turn two days later.

He said that a "clash of ideas" and "arguments" had led to the post but did not reveal who the disagreements were with.

msazali@sph.com.sg



Muhamad Ridhwan's WBC silver featherweight title bout against Namibian Paulus Ambunda, already postponed earlier this month, has been thrown in further doubt by the uncertainty over the future of manager Scott O'Farrell. ST FILE PHOTO

Film-fest atmosphere at S'pore rugby sevens

Xener Gill

Shrek and Kung Fu Panda will be making guest appearances at the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens on April 13 and 14.

But they will not be passing rugby balls or making tackles at the National Stadium. Instead, fans will get the chance to get up close with the movie characters as they parade around the stands.

To top it off, children can look forward

to another DreamWorks treat: all-day screenings of television series such as Trolls: The Beat Goes On! and Dragons: Race To The Edge, while parents enjoy two days of rugby action.

"We want an event that is very ideal for our target audience: families. We want to make sure the total offering matches the demand," said Sports Hub CEO Oon Jin Teik at a media conference yesterday to unveiling the marquee rugby event's fringe offerings.

This year, the organisers will also launch the Singapore Sevens Splash Party as part of the event.

This will take place at the Hub's Splash-N-Surf area, on the third floor of the Kallang Wave Mall, where participants can cool off while being entertained by local acts and roaming entertainment.

On top of that, American band Smash Mouth will perform for the ticketed crowd on April 13. On the second day, the band from the original cast from the Broadway musical

Rock of Ages will be performing a set of 80s rock classics.

"It matches our venue very well. We are uniquely designed for sports, entertainment and lifestyle and that's why we have to maximise and optimise what our venue is made for – we are a stadium and more," said Oon.

Rugby fan Ernie Khoo, 49, is looking forward to the additional activities, saying: "It definitely serves as a push for me to buy my tickets and it's good to see more activities to

make it a carnival event."

Last year, the event ranked second out of 10 legs of the World Rugby Sevens series with a score of 89.9, just 0.2 of a point behind the one in Vancouver, Canada.

"The family aspect we brought into it last year was outstanding. It engaged more of the community, people were more involved and because there were so many things to do, people had a ball," said Martin Williams, Singapore Rugby Union vice-president.

"From the players' perspective, things were much better organised, we looked after them very well and they loved it as a place to visit."

This year, the organisers will continue to ensure the athletes' comfort. Said Oon: "We want to make sure they want to get equal or better treatment – little things like how each individual team get individual suites, good food and laundry services. We also have the biggest warm-up pitch which is more comfortable for them."

xenerg@sph.com.sg

• Family and early-bird discounts are available from \$19 for youth, and \$29 for adults until Feb 28 at www.sportshubtix.sg

COMEBACK QUEEN HO CALLS IT A DAY

Asiad silver medallist cites lack of focus and motivation for decision to retire at 26

Wang Meng Meng

An embodiment of grit and determination, Roanne Ho has fought and conquered serious setbacks throughout her swimming career. But, having achieved a high of an

Asian Games silver last August, training and competition had become a mental grind.

With that burden in mind, she took her final plunge as a competitive swimmer last Saturday morning at the Singapore Swim Series at the OCBC Aquatic Centre, cruising

to victory in the 50m breaststroke in 31.50sec ahead of Kathlyn Laiu (36.18sec).

Explaining her decision to retire, the 26-year-old told The Straits Times yesterday: "A lot of factors came into play. Since I returned to training after the Asian Games, I felt off. I tried to adapt, but I still felt that something wasn't right."

"Probably, I felt that I had achieved what I wanted to achieve, that's why my focus is a bit off even

though I could still do the times that I'm capable of."

She insisted that the decision to retire was not made on the spur of the moment. Rather, it built up since her finest hour at the Asiad in Jakarta, where she won a silver in the 50m breast – Singapore's first breast-stroke medal at the competition.

"I felt that I needed some time (to consider retirement)," she said. "At the Fina World Cup (last November), I remember sitting in the reporting room and feeling a sense of dread. That's when I knew something was wrong."

"In December, I went to training camp (with the national team) and I thought maybe a change of scenery and environment will be good but nothing changed. I thought maybe January will be good as it is a new year but still, nothing changed."

She finally made up her mind at the end of last month after receiving a letter from national sports agency Sport Singapore informing

her that her spexScholarship will not be renewed for this year.

Ho revealed: "That was the sign that I needed. If I'm still on the scholarship, I'm obligated to train and perform and I feel that I cannot be wasting taxpayers' money."

The Queensland University of Technology business graduate will now look for a job in marketing. But, as she heads into the corporate world, she will be remembered as one of the most gutsy swimmers in the Singapore team.

In 2016, her right lung collapsed by 80 per cent and it could have been fatal if she had delayed seeking treatment. A year later in Kuala Lumpur, she won the 50m breast-stroke gold in 31.29sec – a national and SEA Games record.

At the Asiad, she bettered that mark with a 31.23sec effort to finish behind Japan's Satomi Suzuki (30.83sec) despite a stomach virus three days before the final that caused her to vomit seven times in

45 minutes at one point.

National Training Centre head coach Gary Tan believes that Ho can bow out with her head held high, saying: "Apart from Tao Li and Jos (Joscelin Yeo), we don't have many female swimmers who can challenge at the Asian level. Roanne specialises in one event, but she has a creditable number of medals."

"And she has had an impactful career, not just in terms of winning for the nation, but her ability to come back from injuries and illness have also inspired the swimming community."

Ho will depart the local scene with a mixture of relief and sadness.

She said: "I feel mostly relieved, it's a weight off my shoulders. I won't miss waking up at 4.30am and doing all the painful sets."

"But I will miss the travelling with the team, being with a bunch of great people with one purpose."

meng@sph.com.sg



Roanne Ho raising the national flag after winning the 50m breaststroke gold in 31.29sec, a SEA Games record, in Kuala Lumpur 2017. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

ROANNE THE ROLE MODEL

She has had an impactful career, not just in terms of winning for the nation, but her ability to come back from injuries and illness have also inspired the swimming community.



GARY TAN, head coach of the National Training Centre, on why Asian Games silver medallist Roanne Ho can bow out with her head held high.

SportingLife

Stories of hope for swimmer with cancer



Rohit Brijnath

Assistant Sports Editor

At every pool, every field, every day, in every language, they hear the same things, the clichés about striving, the truths about suffering, till it's stamped in their brains, till these overused phrases become like a religious text.

No pain, no gain. Give 100 per cent. Winners never quit.

It's what athletes believe. It's who they are. It's what Rikako Ikee is surely going to lean on as she battles leukaemia. As Eric Shanteau, the swimmer who was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2008 and won a relay gold at the 2012 Olympics, once said: "I'm going to beat it and attack it the same way I did my swimming, so I'll kick the hell out of it."

Fight is the athlete's instinct, fight is what took Ikee to six Asian Games gold medals last year, fight is what lies before her. Cancer at 18 for anyone is an awful, untimely

bruise on the young, a fearful, sometimes fatal, examination that has arrived far ahead of its time.

Cancer for athletes somehow seems even more profane for they are the planet's messengers of health, so physically extraordinary that one might think ordinary human rules don't apply to them. They glisten with energy, they shine with vitality. Full of life and then suddenly fighting for it.

Lance Armstrong, later a fake but whose cancer was real, wrote in his book *It's Not About The Bike*: "I thought I knew what fear was, until I heard the words: You have cancer." And so for Ikee it must confusing, depressing, fearful and she will not be the same, for no grave illness leaves a human unchanged.

But she has help. Not just family, not just her supportive nation, not just her own instinctive determination, but stories to hold onto. Stories of distress from within her tribe; stories not the same for no disease is equal and no severity identical; stories of hope and stubbornness; stories of life and sport beyond disease.

Stories of Wilma Rudolph, the 100m and 200m Olympic champion in Rome 1960, who fought double pneumonia, scarlet fever and had to wear a leg brace; of ice-hockey legend Mario Lemieux,



Fight is the athlete's instinct, fight is what took Ikee to six Asian Games gold medals last year, fight is what lies before her. Cancer at 18 for anyone is an awful, untimely bruise on the young, a fearful, sometimes fatal, examination that has arrived far ahead of its time.

who had Hodgkin's lymphoma and returned to the ice on the day he finished his radiation treatment and scored a goal; of Alice Marble, who had pleurisy at 20, took roughly two years to recover and won five Grand Slam singles titles in the 1930s.

Sport has all sorts of histories including a rich one of defiance, an encyclopaedia of misery yet also of resistance. Gail Devers lost weight, shed hair and told CNN she covered the mirrors in her house "because I didn't want to see myself". Her feet were so swollen that a doctor considered amputation but eventually she recovered from Graves' disease, a problem with the thyroid, and won successive Olympic golds in the 100m in 1992 and 1996.

Day by day is something athletes know, bit by bit they're familiar with. Work ethic is the natural masonry of their existence. And so – as People magazine recounted – when a doctor laid out the cancer treatments to wrestler Jeff Blatnick, who had Hodgkin's lymphoma, his response was classic: "I took it like a training camp." To see videos of Blatnick win Olympic gold two years later in 1984 and sink to his knees weeping is to believe in the fantastic.

It's almost natural that some athletes, used to a certain

terminology and bred to be competitive, draw sporting parallels when confronted by illness.

Armstrong would write: "The more I thought about it, the more cancer began to seem like a race to me. Only the destination had changed..."

"The only difference was I had to focus better and harder than I ever did on the bike. With this illness, I couldn't afford impatience or a lapse in concentration; I had to think about living, just making it through, every single moment. The idea was oddly restorative: winning my life back would be the biggest victory."

Yet for all their faith and courage, not every story ends happily. In life, as with the field, invincibility is a myth. Cancer often wins, so do heart attacks and Lou Gehrig's disease and the list of young and fallen is longer than we think.

Ikee's life has been devoted to speed and yet this seems too fast, this chase for greatness abruptly turned into a pursuit of survival. One day you're talking lap times, the next day chemotherapy. And yet athletes adjust, they adapt, they gather themselves for challenge.

In Jakarta, where I saw her swim at the Asian Games, she wore this beatific smile. A teenager dipped in promise. Her name apparently translates to "glass flower" and yet you cannot win without a quiet steel. And so, in one of her tweets to the world about her illness, one word was unsurprisingly there.

Fight. It's the best she can do. A swimmer in an unfamiliar sea, setting out bravely for the distant shore.

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SportsWorld

Paddlers add 3 bronzes

Singapore's table tennis team finished with one gold and three bronze medals at the Feb 13-17 ITTF Junior Circuit Premium, Czech Junior & Cadet Open.

On Sunday, the Republic's paddlers won three bronzes in the junior girls' team, junior boys' team and cadet girls' doubles to add to the junior boys' doubles gold secured by Koen Pang and Josh Chua last Friday.

The duo were also part of the bronze-winning junior boys' team.

Saudis not buying United

LONDON • Saudi Arabia's crown prince is not seeking to buy Manchester United, its Minister of Media Turki Al-Shabanah tweeted yesterday.

British reports saying Mohammed bin Salman had plans to launch a takeover bid were "completely false", he said.

Mr Al-Shabanah added that there had been a meeting with the country's sovereign wealth fund, regarding a sponsorship opportunity but a deal had yet to materialise. REUTERS

Williams testing delayed

LONDON • Williams missed the first day of Formula One's pre-season testing in Spain yesterday because they have yet to finish their car.

"Unfortunately, we have had to delay the start of our pre-season Barcelona test to Tuesday morning," deputy principal Claire Williams said in a statement.

The British team scored just seven points from 21 races last year, despite having the same engine as champions Mercedes. REUTERS

Monfils trumps Wawrinka

ROTTERDAM • Gael Monfils defeated his good friend Stan Wawrinka 6-3, 1-6, 6-2 on Sunday to win his eighth career tennis title at the Rotterdam Open.

The Frenchman, the runner-up three years ago, held off the Swiss player's second-set surge to ease through the decider.

The 32-year-old said in his post-match interview that "it was an unbelievable week" and his "brother" Wawrinka was "a part of this win". AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOTTERY

TOTO

Mon, 18 Feb 2019 Draw No. 3450/2019

Group 1 Prize \$1,615,432

Winning Numbers

25 26 29 31 46 49 21

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21

Prize Group	Share Amount	No. of Winning Shares
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Group 3	\$2,542	92
Group 4	\$398	321
Group 5	\$50	5,966
Group 6	\$25	8,196
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Asian Champ	Kashima Antlers	Newcastle Jets	6.00pm	LW
Asian Champ	S Hiroshima	Chiangrai Utd	6.00pm	LW
Asian Champ	Ulsan	Perak	6.30pm	LW
Wed, 20 Feb 2019				
UE Champions	Liverpool	Bayern Munich	4.00am	LW*
UE Champions	Lyon	Barcelona	4.00am	LW*

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WE ARE CONTENDERS: KLOPP

Reds boss downplays personal feud with Bayern but aims to overcome old rivals

LONDON • Jurgen Klopp has buried the hatchet of his old rivalry with Bayern Munich but wants Liverpool to prove they are Champions League contenders by beating the German champions in the first leg of their last-16 tie today.

Bayern have won the Bundesliga title for the past six years since Borussia Dortmund claimed back-to-back titles in 2011 and 2012 under Klopp, who also lost the 2013 Champions League final to the Bavarian giants.

The animosity between both sides was further heightened after the five-time European Cup winners picked off some of his best players in Mario Gotze, Mats Hummels and Robert Lewandowski.

But, at his pre-match press conference yesterday, Klopp claimed “it was nothing” and he no longer had any hard feelings.

He said: “There were never any negative things with Bayern but, when we played them or when they bought our players, how could I be happy and say, ‘Great, I’ll bring him in my car’. In these moments, I was not happy, but it is long ago.”

While Liverpool have not won the Champions League since 2005, they came close to adding to their five crowns last season, only to lose to Real Madrid in the final.

Klopp feels the fact his side are now thought of as European heavyweights is an indication of their progress since he took over in 2015.

He said: “The best thing of all the things we did so far since we are together is that we are a real competitor again.”

“Being not only part of the competition but people thinking we can beat Bayern, that’s a big thing. The story so far is a nice one but not finished yet.”

The German is also not the only Reds member who has a past history with Bayern, with Xherdan Shaqiri relishing the opportunity to lock horns against his former club, where he enjoyed 2½ “amazing” seasons from 2012-15.

Joel Matip and Fabinho are expected to form a makeshift centre-back pairing with Virgil van Dijk suspended and Joe Gomez out, although Klopp is prepared to “wait minute by minute to see if there is a chance or not” for Dejan Lovren.

Niko Kovac also has his own concerns, with Jerome Boateng, Arjen Robben and Corentin Tolisso all sidelined and Thomas Muller banned, but Franck Ribery will



play a part after travelling to Merseyside on a later flight after becoming a new father.

However, Klopp is confident their famed “12th man” can spur his side on as they seek to overcome their less-than-ideal defensive situation to take a lead to the Allianz Arena on March 13.

The 51-year-old added: “In Germany, a lot of people talk now about the atmosphere at Anfield. There was a lot of talk that we are maybe the most emotional club in world football.”

“Emotion, in my opinion, is a very positive thing, so let’s show that tomorrow.”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LIVERPOOL V BAYERN

Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214, tomorrow, 3.55am

HIGH HOPES

Being not only part of the competition but people thinking we can beat Bayern, that’s a big thing. The story so far is a nice one but not finished yet.



JURGEN KLOPP, Liverpool manager, on the Reds being resurgent in Europe after making it to the Champions League final last season.

HAIL THE 12TH MAN

In Germany, a lot of people talk now about the atmosphere at Anfield. There was a lot of talk that we are maybe the most emotional club in world football.



KLOPP, on the effect of the Anfield faithful on opposing sides.

Robert Lewandowski (left) and Mats Hummels, who both joined Bayern Munich from Borussia Dortmund, training during their winter camp in Doha last month. Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp used to manage Dortmund but says he has gotten over his fierce rivalry with the Bundesliga giants.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Barca on a mission to right the wrongs

BARCELONA • Clement Lenglet ought to be unscarred by Barcelona’s Champions League failure last season, but disappointment reverberates around the club to the extent that he feels it too.

“You can just sense around the place there is this scar,” he told Agence France-Presse. “It still hurts.”

The French defender described the pain of their 3-0 second-leg collapse against Roma, which saw Barca exit in the Champions League quarter-finals on away goals, like he was part of the team even though his move from Sevilla materialised only last summer.

While the 23-year-old joined a club that had won the La Liga title and the Copa del Rey at a canter, the humiliation in Rome has since hung over Ernesto Valverde’s men like a dark cloud.

But Lenglet can be part of their recovery when Barcelona play Lyon in the first leg of their last-16 tie today and, after three years without making the final four, there is a sense of a team on a mission.

“We want to soothe the scar, do something beautiful so we can forget all about what happened,” he said. “The players were gutted and everyone around the club was too. We have to show it was a mistake, that we can do better.”

But Barca are not travelling to Lyon in the richest vein of form, with their drab 1-0 victory over Valladolid on Saturday following several equally uninspired displays in LaLiga and the Copa del Rey.

However, Valverde has played down the significance of his side going off the boil in recent games.

The Spaniard said: “Sometimes you cannot be brilliant in every game, but the team is ready to play at its very best (in France).”

Defender Gerard Pique, however, knows Lyon are a formidable force at home, having beaten both Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1 and Manchester City in the group stage.

The Spanish champions can be vulnerable when opponents break with pace and the centre-back warned his teammates that they had to “improve on Tuesday or we will suffer a lot”.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

LYON V BARCELONA

StarHub Ch213 & Singtel TV Ch112, tomorrow, 3.55am

Commentary

Tragic case but Cardiff’s bid to avoid Sala fee leaves poor taste

Cardiff had everything they needed to objectively verify their valuation – his stats, goal tally or replays of every match Sala played... Nantes should feel no qualms about seeking the fee through all legal means, despite the insinuations of insensitivity levelled at them.

Matthew Syed

If Emiliano Sala were alive, he would be playing for Cardiff and enjoying the rest of what had been such a promising life.

The 28-year-old, buried in his home town of Progreso in Argentina on Saturday, came across as humble, hard-working, and committed to his future. He was also a fine player who might have made an impact on the English Premier League.

French Ligue 1 team Nantes, for their part, would have received the £5 million (\$\$8.7 million) as the first tranche of payment for the player Cardiff bought for a club-record £15 million.

That was the price agreed to by both clubs, written into a legal and binding contract signed by both parties, and the money upon which Nantes have made plans and

budgetary considerations.

Sala, of course, did not make it across the English Channel in that fateful journey. If there was any negligence from the owners of the aircraft, or anyone else, the case might end up in court or, in any event, become a wrangle between Cardiff and their insurers.

Yet we now hear that Cardiff are seeking to avoid payment, not because of alleged negligence, but because they think they may have paid an inflated price for Sala.

According to a report in the Daily Mail, confirmed by the club, Cardiff have written to other league clubs asking for assistance in “sharing your knowledge of Sala as a player”.

The correspondence from a Cardiff law firm describes him as “the player Cardiff tried to sign” rather than the player that they did sign. The phrasing is telling.

To understand the context, consider the events leading up to this impasse. You will remember



Emiliano Sala with Cardiff’s jersey on Jan 20 after signing for the Premier League side. His plane crashed over the English Channel the next day. The Argentinian was buried in his home town Progreso on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS

that Sala’s transfer was brokered by agent Willie McKay.

In an interview with L’Equipe, he admitted to fomenting coverage in the British press that West Ham and Everton were interested in Sala. These fake stories were a calculated attempt to ignite interest in the player, inflating his sale price.

We also know that when Nantes first asked for payment of the initial tranche of the transfer fee this month, Cardiff refused.

The public stance was the club were “shocked” to have received a

request for payment before Sala’s body had even been recovered.

This is the context in which the latest manoeuvring has to be viewed. It seems like an attempt to delay payment again, but this time by pointing to the legitimacy of the fee itself.

The idea is that if McKay planted false stories to inflate the price, Cardiff may have grounds not to pay. According to sources at the club, they believe that they may have a case of fraud.

It is here that one cannot help but shake one’s head. Cardiff must

know no sane judge would accept a club could reasonably claim to have been defrauded because they were duped by a fake transfer story.

Cardiff had everything they needed to objectively verify their valuation – his stats, goal tally or replays of every match Sala played. One cannot help being reminded of the Latin phrase caveat emptor – buyer beware.

Yet if Cardiff have little prospect of making this argument stand up in court, why are they pushing it so hard? Do they hope that the French club will blink first?

If this is the case, then I suspect Cardiff are making a severe miscalculation. The public, including fans of Cardiff, are not stupid.

Yes, they are horrified by what happened to Sala but they understand that for all the distaste for football agents, it is hypocritical for clubs to use them to leak stories to inflate the price of their own players and then cry blue murder when they do the same to their targets.

Nantes should feel no qualms about seeking the fee through all legal means, despite the insinuations of insensitivity levelled at them.

The moment public relations and spin take precedence over the objectivity of a signed contract, we are all in trouble. THE TIMES, LONDON

Indonesian football chief grilled over match-fixing

JAKARTA • Indonesia’s top football official, who has been in the job less than a month, was questioned by police yesterday over a match-fixing scandal that has rocked the country’s domestic league.

Joko Driyono became acting chair-

man of the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI) in late January after Edy Rahmayadi stepped down in the wake of a corruption probe that has seen police identify more than a dozen suspects.

Joko was questioned yesterday

over allegations he was involved in destroying evidence of match-fixing. National police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo said: “The main focus of today’s examination concerns the problem of destruction, theft and removal of evidence.”

Police raided Joko’s apartment last week and confiscated laptops, flash drives and dozens of documents, including match and financial records. He has been slapped with a 20-day travel ban, but has not yet been arrested.

Indonesian football has been rocked by a series of match-fixing allegations, with the association and police announcing a crackdown in December after a PSSI executive member was caught on tape trying to bribe a coach approximately US\$10,000 (\$\$13,600) to throw a second-division game.

He resigned and was handed a three-year ban and fine.

While it has a low international

profile, Indonesia has attracted ex-Premier League players including former Chelsea star Michael Essien and former Tottenham midfielder Didier Zokora.

But Indonesian football has been tarnished on the global stage by a host of problems over the years, including deadly hooliganism and foreign players dying after going unpaid and being unable to afford medical care. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SPORT

OSAKA WON'T PUT SUCCESS OVER HAPPINESS

World No. 1 Japanese refutes suggestions that split with coach Sascha Bajin is over money

DUBAI • Naomi Osaka said she valued happiness more than on-court success as she opened up about her split last week with coach Sascha Bajin, who led her to consecutive tennis Grand Slam titles – the US Open and the Australian Open.

Ahead of her first event as world No. 1 at the Dubai Tennis Championships yesterday, she insisted that the split was not about money.

“Everyone thinks it was a money-related issue, but it wasn’t,” the 21-year-old Japanese told reporters at the Jumeirah Creekside Hotel on Sunday.

“For me, that’s one of the most hurtful things I’ve ever heard.

“I travel with everyone on my team, I see them more than my family. I would never do that to them.

“I think my reason is I wouldn’t put success over my happiness – because if I’m not happy being around certain people, I’m not going to torture myself.

“I think everyone knows, in Charleston and stuff, I’ve had moments. That’s my main thing.”

She was referring to a low point last year, a third-round loss in Charleston that followed her first career title at Indian Wells. Then, she

woke up the previous day feeling “depressed” and was not sure why.

She added in comments to WTA Insider on Sunday: “If I’m not waking up every day happy to practise and happy to be around the people I’m around, this is my life, I’m not going to sacrifice that just to keep a person around. I have to be happy with where I am at my life.”

She did not want to say “anything bad” about the 34-year-old German Bajin because she was “really grateful for all the things that he’s done”.

The three reigning Slam holders have now all parted ways with their coaches, for different reasons:

- French Open champion Simona Halep with Thierry van Cleemput because “we are not a good fit together... on court, the chemistry is not there”.

- Wimbledon winner Angelique Kerber with Wim Fissette because of “differences of opinion on the future of the alignment”.

But Osaka’s decision is not sudden. She said: “It was kind of brewing in Australia. I think some people could see that if they saw how

we interacted.”

For her, the main reason was to change the energy of the team.

The WTA quoted her as saying: “Everyone around me is really good at change and adapting.

“You kind of have to do that to be around me. If you’re not, then it gets a little bit tough.”

Her team in Dubai include her father Leonard Francois, fitness trainer Abdul Sillah, trainer Kristy Stahr and Japanese coach Masashi Yoshikawa.

She said: “Yoshikawa-san is not really my coach-coach. He’s just been helping me since I was 16.

“He’s one of the people who knows my game the most. He’s always around at certain tournaments, he’s always helping.

“I thought it would be a good idea for him to come here since I’m sort of stuck right now.”

Osaka will start her search for a coach after Dubai. Asked what qualities she is looking for, she said she wanted someone with a positive mindset and who is also direct.

She added: “I don’t want someone that’s in the box saying negative stuff. That would be the worst.

“Yeah, someone that’s kind of direct, not afraid to say things to my face. I’d rather someone say it directly to me than go around my back. That’s one of the biggest things.” REUTERS

NO BACK-STABBERS PLEASE

Someone that’s kind of direct, not afraid to say things to my face. I’d rather someone say it directly to me than go around my back. That’s one of the biggest things.



NAOMI OSAKA, women’s world No. 1, on what she is looking for in her next coach.



Naomi Osaka showing off her culinary skills as part of the fringe activities before the start of the Dubai Tennis Championships. PHOTO: TWITTER/ DDFTENNIS



LeBron James going up for a dunk during the NBA All-Star game at the Spectrum Centre in Charlotte on Sunday. Team LeBron, who were led by Most Valuable Player Kevin Durant’s 31 points, outscored Team Giannis 178-164. PHOTO: DPA

James focused on making play-offs

CHARLOTTE (North Carolina) • It was a long-range spectacle as Team LeBron outgunned Team Giannis 178-164 in the All-Star Game on Sunday but, as far as James is concerned, his sights are now fully trained on getting back into the play-off race.

Both teams combined for 167 tries from deep as the game at the Spectrum Centre turned into a three-point shooting contest, with Team LeBron connecting on 35 out of 90 attempts, while their opponents hit 27 from 77.

Kevin Durant poured in 31 points for James’ team and took the Most Valuable Player honours, while Antetokounmpo led all scorers with 38 points after being named as a

captain for the first time.

However, with the festivities over, James was keen to get back to business, with the Los Angeles Lakers three games behind the LA Clippers, who occupy the eighth and final play-off spot in the West.

The forward said: “Looking forward to the second half of the season. That’s my only mindset.

“That’s the only thing that’s going to happen in my mental space for these next two months, pretty much on how I can get this team to play the type of basketball we were playing before my injury (which led to a 17-game absence).”

He was, however, thrilled to share the court one last time with Dwyane Wade, his former Miami

Heat teammate, who is entering the home stretch of his 16th and final National Basketball Association season.

“It meant everything,” he said of Wade, who was on his team as an honorary All-Star. “It’s been a bit-sweet moment for me with him.

“The bitter part is obviously this is the last time playing the game we love so much (together).”

While Wade is going about his farewell tour, the 24-year-old Antetokounmpo will only “get better” after drawing praise from his peers on his third All-Star appearance.

Durant said: “He’s got potential through the roof. It’s scary to see how far he can keep going.” DPA, REUTERS

Show off your unusual bikes to win OCBC Cycle slots

Calling all cycling enthusiasts: The Straits Times and OCBC Bank are on the lookout for Singapore’s most interesting bicycles.

If you think that you or your friend owns an unusual bike, submit a photo and a short write-up to stand a chance to win one of three pairs of slots to this year’s event. For details, see graphic (right).

There are two categories: The 42km Sportive Ride (\$99 per person)

son) and the 23km The Straits Times Ride (\$59 per person).

The route, which begins at the Singapore Sports Hub, takes riders past various iconic sights like the Singapore Flyer, Gardens by the Bay and Marina Bay Sands.

The May 11-12 event at the Sports Hub offers competitive and non-competitive routes as well as a kids and family route. Interested riders can register at ocbccycle.com.

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

FOOTBALL

Asian Champions League Play-off round: Shandong v Hanoi (3.20pm), Ulsan v Perak (6.20pm) – Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208. **Kashima v Newcastle** (Ch115 & Ch209, 5.50pm). **Uefa Champions League** Last 16, 1st leg: Lyon v Barcelona (StarHub Ch213 & Singtel TV Ch112), Liverpool v Bayern (Ch110 & Ch214) – tomorrow, 3.55am.

TENNIS

ATP Rio Open Day 2 (StarHub Ch201, tomorrow, 3.30am).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL

Uefa Europa League Last 32, 2nd leg: Sevilla v Lazio (Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214, Thursday, 12.55am). **Uefa Champions League** Last 16, 1st leg: Atletico v Juventus (StarHub Ch213 & Singtel TV Ch112), Schalke v Man City (Ch110 & Ch214) – Thursday, 3.55am.

TENNIS

ATP Rio Open Day 3 (StarHub Ch201, Thursday, 3.30am).

WIN OCBC Cycle slots

OCBC Cycle, in partnership with The Straits Times, is offering ST readers a chance to win 3 pairs of slots to the May 11-12 OCBC Cycle.

To earn a chance of winning a pair of slots in either the 42km The Sportive Ride (\$99) or the 23km The Straits Times Ride (\$59), simply send us a photo of your unique bike together with a short caption (50 words or less) telling us what makes your bike special.



E-mail your photo and caption (subject header: OCBC Cycle 2019), together with your name, IC and contact number to participate@ocbccycle.com by 5pm, Monday (Feb 25).

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Slots are personal to the holder, and one other person nominated by the holder, and are strictly non-transferable or exchangeable.
- By entering this contest, you agree to share data (including personal data) with organisers solely for the purposes of this contest.

- The judges’ decision is final.
- Employees of OCBC Bank and Singapore Press Holdings are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Entry to the OCBC Cycle 2019 event is valid only on the date of that slot’s category.

WIN VIP tickets

Some of the world’s best golfers will be in town and The Straits Times, in partnership with the HSBC Women’s World Championship, is offering ST readers a chance to catch the action.

To earn a chance of winning a pair of VIP hospitality tickets worth \$2,400,

- Like the HSBC Women’s World Championship Facebook page and
- Answer the following question correctly.

Q: On which course will the HSBC Women’s World Championship be played?

E-mail your answers (subject header: HSBC Women’s World Championship 2019), together with your name, IC and contact number to admin@roccomms.com by Wednesday, Feb 20, 8am.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Passes are not exchangeable.
- By entering this contest, you agree to share data (including personal data) with organisers solely for the purposes of this contest.
- The organisers’ decision is final.
- Employees of Roco Communications and Singapore Press Holdings are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Passes to the tournament are valid only for admission to the New Tanjong

Course at the Sentosa Golf Club and such other designated area(s) (the “Venue”) on the date(s) as shown. The Sentosa Island admission fee and vehicle fee shall still apply. Passes must be produced at appropriate entry points and/or on demand by any authorised official. Pass holders shall display their passes at all times while they are at the venue.

- All passes are personal to the holders and are strictly non-transferable.

life

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Tamara Claire Fernandez, 19

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www.oursgheritage.sg



JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

Designers of book covers go to great lengths to deliver eye-catching looks, from throwing food on the ground to stripping for the camera



Olivia Ho

"Don't judge a book by its cover," the saying may go, but a cover can make or break a book's chances of flying off the shelf.

Yet, book cover design in Singapore is an unsung art.

Few know of the lengths designers go to to deliver eye-catching covers at low cost - throwing food on the ground, sticking text in the oven and even stripping for the camera.

Ms Kelley Cheng, 46, creative director of publishing and design consultancy The Press Room, who has been doing covers for 20 years, says: "For publishers, a good book cover means that out of the thousands of books in a shop, it has the power to make people pick it up without even knowing what the content is."

"Picking up a book means there is a 50 per cent chance of selling the person that book."

Book design remains a niche field in Singapore and many designers rely on other work, such as illustration, branding and graphic design, to pay the bills.

But as an art form, it has been receiving more recognition in recent years.

Last year, the Singapore Literature Prize invited the public to vote for the first time for its favourite book covers from the shortlist.

The winners included Myanmar designer Jessica Kusuma's cover for Charmaine Leung's 2017 memoir 17A Keong Saik Road, in which hand-torn paper reveals a painting of the eponymous address.

The annual Singapore Book Awards by the Singapore Book Publishers Association has given out a Best Book Cover Design prize for the past three years, which has been won twice by 27-year-old Malaysian Yong Wen Yeu.

Mr Yong, a Singapore permanent resident, designed some 50 books over five years at local publisher Epigram Books before going freelance.

He won in 2016 for the special edition cover of Sonny Liew's graphic novel The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye and last year for The Gatekeeper, Nuraliah Norasid's debut novel about a young woman with medusa-like powers.

On the cover of The Gatekeeper, which won the 2016 Epigram Books Fiction Prize, gold-flecked snakes twine themselves around the title in the shape of a face.

The use of gold increased the cost of production by about 50 cents to \$1 a book, but Mr Yong pushed for it.

"She was the winner, so I wanted to do something special," he says. He got the concept of The Gatekeeper right in one go, but other books have taken him up to 20 attempts.



Graphic design studio Sarah and Schooling's Sarah Tang (left) and Alison Schooling have designed more than 400 book covers, including those for Krishna Udayasankar's *Objects Of Affection* (right top) and Joshua Ip's *Making Love With Scrabble Tiles* (right above). PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE, MATH PAPER PRESS

The 2017 Best Book Cover Design winner was event host Danny Yeo's Yang Sheng Tang (Speaker's Hall), a Chinese-language collection of his writings.

On the striking cover, Yeo holds up a grid containing the eight basic strokes of Chinese writing against a backdrop of spreading ink blots.

Yeo, 46, conceptualised the cover himself and realised it with the help of a designer friend.

"I am quite a control freak," he admits, "so I usually want to control the look of the book. The book cover is an extension of the book content."

Last year, an exhibition at The

Arts House reinterpreted the covers of 16 out-of-print local classics, from Stella Kon's play *Emily Of Emerald Hill* to Bonny Hicks' memoir, *Excuse Me, Are You A Model?*

The exhibition, *Out Of Print*, was helmed by local non-profit group Sing Lit Station and Sarah and Schooling, a graphic design studio that has made sleek covers of Singapore literary books its calling card.

It is run by best friends Sarah Tang, 30, and Alison Schooling, 31, who have designed between 400 and 500 book covers since their studio opened in 2013.

Singapore publishers and self-published local authors pay the duo

up to 80 per cent less compared with the market rate for their designs. "We think local literature deserves nice covers," says Ms Schooling.

"Back in the day, many of the books were designed by the printers themselves and they didn't necessarily have a good eye for design - the focus was on the content."

GETTING CREATIVE

To keep costs low for publishers, designers often have to get creative.

For food writer Christopher Tan's 2015 cookbook *NerdBaker*, Mr Yong piped the book's title in batter and baked it in the oven, before photographing it.

Sarah and Schooling scattered colourful cereal on the ground for Krishna Udayasankar's 2013 poetry collection *Objects Of Affection*. "Such a mess," says Ms Tang with a sigh.

As they did not have the budget to hire a nude model for the cover of poet Joshua Ip's 2013 collection *Making Love With Scrabble Tiles*, Ms Tang posed naked for Ms Schooling's camera.

It is important, they say, that they read the books they design. They describe their approach as "simplest, not too busy, not too expensive" and design with the general public in mind.

Ms Tang says: "We want to design for our mothers, our grandmothers, the 40-year-old auntie who wants to go cut hair for \$15."

Often, a cover will contribute to the branding of the book.

Books by Math Paper Press, the publishing arm of independent bookshop BooksActually, are consistently identifiable by the circles it uses for poetry covers and the elliptical rectangles for prose.

Sociologist Teo You Yenn's best-selling essay collection *This Is What Inequality Looks Like* (2018) stands out because of designer Jacintha Yap's stark white cover, on which the word "inequality" is hard to see.

Perhaps the most iconic book covers in Singapore history are the infamous red eyes of Russell Lee's *True Singapore Ghost Stories*, which across 25 volumes have haunted the dreams of many a Singaporean.

TELLING THE STORY UPFRONT
continued on D2

Malaysian Yong Wen Yeu (above) won the Singapore Book Publishers Association's Best Book Cover Design prize twice - in 2016 for the special edition cover of Sonny Liew's graphic novel *The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* and last year for *The Gatekeeper* (both in the background), Nuraliah Norasid's debut novel about a medusa.

ST PHOTO:
MATTHIAS CHONG

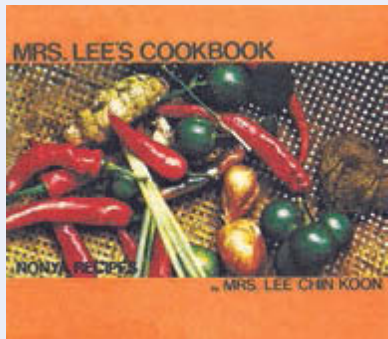
Iconic book covers

To mark its 50th anniversary last year, the Singapore Book Publishers Association put out a set of books on local publishing history.

Cover Stories collects landmark book covers from 1968 to 2018.

Here are five iconic covers from the book which hark back to yesteryear.

• Cover Stories, edited by Edmund Wee, and Lead Stories, edited by Chong Lingying and Lim Li Kok, are available as a set for \$53.50 from Books Kinokuniya, Times, MPH, Bookhaven in NUS University Town and localbooks.sg.



1. Mrs. Lee's Cookbook (1974)
By Mrs Lee Chin Koon (self-published)

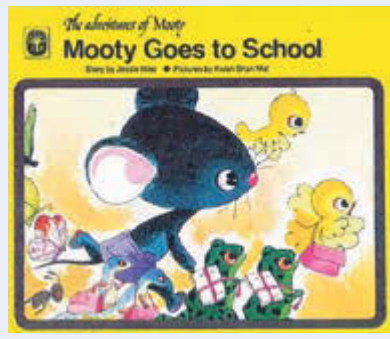
This kitchen shelf staple collects recipes on Peranakan dishes such as ayam buah keluak and mee siam by the then-67-year-old Mrs Lee, mother of Singapore's founding premier Lee Kuan Yew.



2. Little Ironies: Stories Of Singapore (1978)
By Catherine Lim (Heinemann Educational Books Asia)

This debut short-story collection by the grande dame of local literature will be familiar to literature students of yore – in 1986 it became one of the two first books by Singapore authors to be chosen as N-level set texts.

The other was Sing To The Dawn by Ho Minfong.



3. The Adventures Of Mooty (1980)
By Jessie Wee and Kwan Shan Mei (Federal Publications)

This popular children's series, written by Wee and illustrated by Kwan, endeared Mooty and his escapades to generations of young Singaporeans.

Kwan's illustrations for Mooty are among her best-known work.



4. The Teenage Textbook (1988)
By Adrian Tan (Hotspot Books)

This well-loved teenage romance was penned by Tan when he was a law undergraduate at the National University of Singapore.

The book and its sequel, The Teenage Workbook, have sold more than 50,000 copies to date, topped The Sunday Times' fiction bestseller list for two years and were made into a movie in 1998.

The cover was designed by artist Lim Tiong Ghee, who went on to win the UOB Painting of the Year competition in 1989.



5. True Singapore Ghost Stories (1989-present)
By Russell Lee (Angsana Books)

This popular series of hair-raising horror tales by the enigmatic Lee, who keeps his identity a secret, now runs to 25 volumes and is a fixture in The Straits Times' bestseller list for children's fiction, with more than 1.5 million copies sold.

PHOTOS: ANGSA NA BOOKS, FEDERAL PUBLICATIONS, HEINEMANN EDUCATIONAL BOOKS ASIA, HOTSPOT BOOKS, LEE CHIN KOON

Telling the story upfront

FROM D1

A pioneer in local cover design was the late illustrator Kwan Shan Mei, who was the subject of two exhibitions last year.

It is not known exactly how many book covers she designed, although her biographer Oscar Ng says it is more than 150.

She drew not only for the popular 1980s children's series Mooty The Mouse, but also textbooks and Ministry Of Education pilot readers, including the 1974 picture book

Bala On The Moon.

Her style was not so much distinctive as versatile – in the Moongate series of folktales, for instance, she drew in 20 different styles.

Her name was often not featured with her work, adds Ms Ng, head of alumni relations at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

Today, many local publishers prioritise cover design and several see the merit in commissioning redesigns for new editions.

Straits Times Press has plans to redesign covers for about 20 of its books. General manager Tan Ooi

Boon, 50, says: "We want to give a fresh look to our covers and also to highlight to readers things they may have missed in past editions."

For instance, he cites the redesign of plastic surgeon Waffles Wu's 2018 memoir, Life In Plastic, which includes a photo from Dr Wu's childhood to demonstrate that the book is not just about his medical career, but also other episodes from his life.

Epigram has had four different covers for The Art Of Charlie Chan Hock Chye.

It also redesigned five covers for

the British market, including Waran Kalasegaran's historical novel Lieutenant Kurosawa's Errand Boy (2017), the original design of which was deemed somewhat "young adult".

Epigram founder Edmund Wee, 66, says: "We place great importance on the cover design of our books. But we do not always get them 'right'... If we feel the covers can be improved, we will do a new one for the reprint."

Such cover changes can meet with resistance. British-Australian author Jon Gresham, a Singapore

permanent resident, was against redesigning the cover of his short-story collection, We Rose Up Slowly (2015), for its second edition by Math Paper Press.

The first cover featured a tiny naked couple in the clouds. On the second cover by the publisher's in-house designer Haw Shing Yee, a young woman appears to be levitating in a convenience store.

But the new cover grew on Gresham, 50. "Changing a book's cover is like having cosmetic surgery," he says. "It shouldn't alter anything on the inside, but in-

evitably transforms the way a book is represented.

"I let go and rose up out of the way, trusting my publisher on what would make readers pick up the new edition and take it home."

According to his publisher Kenny Leck, the new cover helped boost sales of the book from an average of three copies a week to at least five.

A good book cover conveys the story in a single "stroke", says Ms Cheng. When the cover is right, "it really has mileage", she adds.

oliviaho@sph.com.sg

Bestsellers

FICTION

1. (1) **Love Looks Pretty On You** by Lang Leav
2. (2) **The Travelling Cat Chronicles** by Hiro Arikawa
3. (3) **The Next Person You Meet In Heaven** by Mitch Albom
4. (9) **I Owe You One** by Sophie Kinsella
5. (4) **Crazy Rich Asians** by Kevin Kwan
6. (5) **Rich People Problems** by Kevin Kwan
7. (8) **Legends Of The Condor Heroes #2: A Bond Undone** by Jin Yong
8. (6) **China Rich Girlfriend** by Kevin Kwan
9. (-) **Sea Of Strangers** by Lang Leav
10. (10) **The Five People You Meet In Heaven** by Mitch Albom

NON-FICTION

1. (1) **Becoming** by Michelle Obama
2. (3) **This Is What Inequality Looks Like** by Teo You Yenn
3. (5) **The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A F*ck** by Mark Manson
4. (2) **Billion Dollar Whale** by Tom Wright and Bradley Hope
5. (6) **Brief Answers To The Big Questions** by Stephen Hawking
6. (4) **The Art Of Thinking Clearly** by Rolf Dobelli
7. (8) **When Breath Becomes Air** by Paul Kalanithi
8. (9) **Tall Order** by Peh Shing Huei
9. (-) **The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down** by Haemin Sunim
10. (7) **Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind** by Yuval Noah Harari

CHILDREN'S

1. (1) **Dog Man #6: Brawl Of The Wild** by Dav Pilkey
2. (2) **Dog Man #5: Lord Of The Fleas** by Dav Pilkey
3. (3) **Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: The Meltdown** by Jeff Kinney
4. (4) **Dork Diaries #13: Tales From A Not-So-Happy Birthday** by Rachel Renee Russell
5. (5) **How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World Ultimate Movie Guide** by DreamWorks Animation
6. (-) **Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: The Getaway** by Jeff Kinney
7. (6) **Roblox Top Adventure Games** by Egmont
8. (7) **Roblox Annual 2019** by Egmont
9. (-) **The Lego Movie 2 Junior Novel** by Scholastic
10. (-) **Dog Man #4: Dog Man And Cat Kid** by Dav Pilkey

• This is The Straits Times' compilation of bestseller lists from Books Kinokuniya, Times, WHSmith and Popular bookstores.

Reviews

Incisive look at South Korea's difficult issues

FICTION

AT DUSK

By Hwang Sok-yong, translated by Sora Kim-Russell
Scribe/Paperback/188 pages/
\$22.95/Books Kinokuniya/★★★★☆

Walter Sim

With his quiet wisdom, incisive eye for detail and contemplative take on modernity, Hwang Sok-yong, 75, has earned a reputation for being one of South Korea's most eminent and critically acclaimed writers.

The melancholic artistry of his bare prose shines through in *At Dusk*, with the juxtaposition of the nostalgia of a bygone era and a soulless modernity.

He takes a hard look at South Korea's tribulations as a third-world economy under the dictatorship of former leader Park Chung-hee, who ruled from 1963 to 1979, and the present-day struggles of its youth, in a country where the youth unemployment rate stands at 10.5 per cent.

Besides poverty, he also takes on pertinent themes such as the depopulation of rural towns and these towns' modern upgrades that cause them to lose their former character.

Hwang fittingly taps as his protagonist Park Min-woo, a successful architect who had been born into poverty, but used his street smarts, ambition and talent to climb the social and meritocratic ladder to head a large architectural firm.

But his past catches up with him. A sudden, mysterious message from childhood lover Cha Soo-na one day prompts him to return to his home town where he takes a hard look at his role in steamrolling the past.

"I couldn't wrap my brain around how civilised it had become – my home town, which now had more people who'd left than people who'd stayed. The boxy two- and three-storey cement buildings that occupied downtown from the shopping area all the way to the residential area looked bleaker than ever," Park narrates.

"It was as if me, my long-departed parents, and even my home town itself had never really existed."

Another main character is the young and struggling theatre playwright Jung Woo-hee, who has to juggle rehearsals for an upcoming play and works the graveyard shift at a convenience store just to be able to afford a roof above her head.

"As I lie in bed, looking up at that



At Dusk (above)
by Hwang Sok-yong (left) examines issues such as poverty in South Korea.
PHOTOS: SCRIBE

stain spreading across the wall, I suddenly feel breathless, like I am suffocating, and fight the urge to scream hysterically," she says.

She adds of her peers who are struggling like her: "They reminded me of the tiny mammals who cower among the beasts of prey deep in the jungle and must survive on their wits alone."

In *At Dusk*, Hwang taps a common narrative trope of having seemingly disparate and unconnected story arcs that converge in the closing chapters – albeit to somewhat unconvincing effect though perhaps typical of a Korean melodrama.

The septuagenarian himself has a dramatic past, having spent years in jail as a political prisoner, including a seven-year sentence in 1993 for

an unauthorised trip to North Korea to promote cultural exchanges.

He has earned high praise from fellow East Asian writers, including Japan's Nobel Prize for literature laureate Kenzaburo Oe, 84, who has said Hwang is "undoubtedly the most powerful voice in Asia today".

And this voice is resounding in *At Dusk*, with its bittersweet meditation of regret.

If you like this, read: *Please Look After Mom* by Shin Kyung-sook (Orion Publishing, 2012, \$18.95, Books Kinokuniya). In this haunting look at what "family" means in Korean culture, family members search for their mother when she goes missing at a subway station, but soon realise they do not really know who she is.

Thought-provoking read on gender and identity



American novelist Julie Cohen's (above) latest work, *Louis & Louise*, has relatable characters.

PHOTOS: ORION, STEWART SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY



FICTION

LOUIS & LOUISE

By Julie Cohen
Orion Books/
Paperback/
366 pages/
\$29.99/
Books Kinokuniya
★★★★☆

Rachel Au-yong

On Sept 8, 1978, a doctor in a small American town announces the gender of a red-haired baby Lou, marking the moment when one life diverges into disparate parallel timelines – one where Lou is a boy, the other where she is a girl.

Both have the same parents, best friends, talents and tics. But they leave home at 18 for different reasons and return 12 years later over requests from different people.

The reader sees how a different chromosome charts how each Lou grows up and sets him or her on his or her own path into mid-life.

This premise sets the stage for

American novelist Julie Cohen's latest work – a breezy but thought-provoking read about the powerful role gender has on identity.

Cohen gets readers shifting between perspectives, such as those of Louis' and Louise's, where events unfold the same either way.

In lesser hands, the gender trope would have been gimmicky.

But Cohen deftly rotates through the different points of view, being so matter-of-fact that it takes a while for the insidiousness of the biases to sink in. For example, Louise's report card reflects that she chatters too much; Louis is "doing well in spite of distractions".

Louise wears contact lenses from a young age to not hide her "pretty eyes" upon her beauty queen mother's urging; Louis wears glasses well until college.

Cohen goes beyond gender to look at whether social class, sexuality and relationships shape one's sense of self. Spoiler alert: They do. But the extent to which these factors affect how the life of Louis or Louise turns out is never fully spelt out.

Consider the adult Louis, who is living his childhood dream as a modestly successful writer. How much of that happened because he inherited a large sum of money as the heir to a storied paper mill?

Or Louise – would she have been a single mum if she had a better relationship with her mother?

While these are heavy themes, Cohen keeps the reader engaged by making the characters feel real. Their flaws and quirks are relatable – Lou's best friend Allie can stomach multiple re-runs of the 1940s *Casablanca* movie, while their father tends not to probe, leaving them free to do what they want but also isolated.

It is through the Lous' relationships that the reader comes to see how love, no matter what gender, is the main driving force in life.

If you like this, read: *4 3 2 1* by Paul Auster (Faber & Faber, \$27.82, Books Kinokuniya), about four identical Archibald Isaac Fergusons who will lead four parallel and entirely different lives, where fortunes, athletic skills and relationships diverge.

Mellow Marsalis wants to share jazz

Pulitzer Prize-winning musician Wynton Marsalis has led his Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra on a tireless education outreach

Ong Sor Fern
Senior Culture Correspondent

Age has mellowed musician Wynton Marsalis.

The 58-year-old muses: “I guess everyone mellows.”

Certainly, the jazz superstar seems to be more tolerant of publicity demands these days, as The Straits Times discovers.

Compared with previous chats with the newspaper, where the mercurial musician went from chatty and ebullient to bored and disinterested in a flash, Marsalis is positively zen in this latest conversation over the telephone from his office in New York’s Jazz At Lincoln Center.

He ponders a question about what advice he would give his younger self, muttering the question to himself before answering thoughtfully: “When you think something is not going to work out, you expend a certain type of frantic energy. If I could take my older self to go back to being younger, I’d be more deliberate and calm with my energy.”

“When I was younger, I’d just be hollering, cussing and screaming. I wouldn’t do that.”

But the Louisiana-born musician, whose languid speech is littered with polite “Yes ma’am”s, is quick to add with a conspiratorial chuckle: “Some of that cussing stuff is fun now. I’m not going to take all of that away.”

It is evident that his sense of mischief is still alive and well. Music fans here will get to sample his Southern charm when the trumpeter returns for a fourth time to Singapore with his renowned Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra.

They will be playing two gigs at the Esplanade on March 8 and 9, as well as a Saturday afternoon Jazz For Young People session, which is targeted at students.

Educating the young about jazz is a cause close to the heart of

Marsalis, who won a prestigious Peabody Award for his educational outreach in two 1995 programmes, the television series Marsalis On Music and the radio programme Making The Music.

He even remembers the Jazz For Young People Concert he last played at the Esplanade, 17 years ago, when the orchestra was part of the venue’s Opening Season line-up.

“It was Mingus,” he recalls of the programme, which featured the music of bassist Charles Mingus and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie.

He adds: “That’s a beautiful hall too – I remember that.”

He and the orchestra had fun putting the then-new hall through its acoustic paces, and for an encore, he serenaded opera diva Jessye Norman, also in town for the Esplanade’s opening, with a sotto voce solo.

This time around, Marsalis and the orchestra will be playing a selection of Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

He picked these two jazz greats for a reason. “They represent two different perspectives on the orchestral tradition of jazz.”

“Duke Ellington’s music – there’s a lot of very inventive compositions and a great deal of complexity. Count Basie’s music is like community music with rhythms, and very soulful but earthy phrases.”

It is no surprise that the one-time enfant terrible of jazz has chosen a conservative programme.

His meteoric rise in the jazz world was accompanied by much controversy as he championed the older forms of jazz such as swing and bebop while scorning newer subgenres such as fusion and avant-garde.

As the founder of Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra, he has put his aesthetic stamp on the outfit which has become famous for its tight musicianship, its role in establishing a jazz canon and its tireless education outreach.

Marsalis’ ambitious output as a composer has also been inextricably tied to the orchestra, which debuted his Pulitzer Prize-winning oratorio, Blood On The Fields, in 1994.

After 31 years at its helm, from its genesis as a series of programmes to an institution at the Lincoln Center, Marsalis says he has thought about handing over the reins. “We think and talk about that all the time: What will our younger generation do?”

And he has a timeline for his



handover. “In the next 10 years, it’s going to be time for us to make that transition.”

While he has put his stamp on the orchestra, he has also learnt a few things in the process.

He says: “One, I learnt that a lifetime is not enough to learn how to play. The second thing that I realised, it’s important for you to be quiet if you are going to learn. You cannot listen and talk at the same time.”

“The third thing I learnt is the importance of trusting others. Because there’s a lot more world you cannot see if you can’t trust other people.”

“If you don’t trust other people, you see only the world you want to see. You trust others, you reveal a whole lot more of the world.”

His easygoing approach extends to his children too.

The father of three sons, aged between 24 and 30, says jokingly: “If my kids do things that are legal, I’m happy. I don’t put things on them. It’s their lives. If I can help them do what they’re doing, I wanna help.”

He has helped his daughter Oni, 10, to record a couple of Christmas singles. He says it was his idea to get her to sing after he was approached by clothing brand Brooks Brothers.

“They were really just asking if they could use a picture of her. They saw a picture of her at a gala. I said, well, she can sing and she can do a song with us.”

The 2017 single Jingle Bells was the result. It proved so popular, Marsalis recorded another single with Oni, Winter Wonderland, last year.

There is a note of pride as he talks about his daughter, but the perfectionist musician in him cannot help but add: “She doesn’t really practise all the time, but she’s got a kind of natural feeling. If we do another song, she has to learn how to scat sing.”

As for his own musical plans, he is still planning to write the opera about America’s civil war, which he first told The Straits Times about in 2012. “I haven’t started working on it yet, but it’s called Babel On This Ground.”

In the meantime, he adds, he is looking forward to his return engagement with Singapore.

The cheekiness returns as he says slyly: “I remember a lot of stuff. Some I can’t really talk about in the paper.”

What he can talk about: “I remember the kind of religious freedom that people have, the diversity of people, the industriousness of people, how clean everything is. I had a great time there.”

And as if to emphasise it, he sings songs again: “I had a great time there.”

Marsalis, it seems, is in a mellow tone.

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• www.facebook.com/OngSorFern

Besides two gigs, musician Wynton Marsalis (above) and his orchestra will play an afternoon jazz session for young people, targeted at students, in Singapore next month. PHOTO: PIPER FERGUSON

BOOK IT / MOSAIC MUSIC SERIES: JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA WITH WYNTON MARSALIS
.....
WHERE: Esplanade Concert Hall, 1 Esplanade Drive
.....
WHEN: March 8 and 9, 7.30pm
.....
ADMISSION: \$58 to \$158 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

Exclusively for subscribers of The Straits Times

Asian Masters cooking demonstration by chef Selamat Susanto

Asian Masters returns for its seventh edition from March 1, 2019 till Feb 29, 2020 and celebrates the best of Asian gastronomy.

The programme line-up includes a series of cooking demonstrations by renowned chefs from top Asian restaurants.



The Straits Times is giving away 30 pairs of passes to this session on March 2 at 10am.

HOW TO WIN

1. Download the SPH Rewards app.
2. Look for the giveaway in the Rewards section.
3. Press the “JOIN” button and answer this question:

This cooking demonstration by chef Selamat Susanto and hosted by ST senior food correspondent Wong Ah Yoke is part of Asian Masters 2019. True or False?

The contest ends on Feb 22.
Terms and conditions apply.



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Timeline of Wynton Marsalis’ life

- Born on Oct 18, 1961 to jazz pianist Ellis Marsalis and his wife Dolores. He is the second of six sons. Three of his brothers are also jazz musicians: saxophonist Branford, trombonist Delfeayo and drummer Jason.
- At age six, he is given his first trumpet by American trumpeter Al Hirt.
- At 17, he becomes the youngest musician to be admitted to Tanglewood’s Berkshire Music Center.
- Moves to New York in 1979 to attend the renowned Juilliard music school.
- Joins drummer Art Blakey’s famous Jazz Messengers in 1980.
- Releases debut album, Haydn/Hummel/L. Mozart: Trumpet Concertos, with the National Philharmonic Orchestra in 1983, which won the 1984 Grammy for Best Classical Soloist with an Orchestra. He also won the Grammy for Best Improvised Jazz Solo in 1984 for Think Of One, making him the only musician to have won in the Classical and Jazz categories in the same year.
- Wins classical and jazz Grammys for second year for Baroque Music



The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra (above), founded by Wynton Marsalis, began as a series of programmes.
PHOTO: PIPER FERGUSON

- For Trumpet and Hot House Flowers.
- Co-founds a jazz programme at New York’s Lincoln Center in 1987 which, thanks to its success, evolves into Jazz At Lincoln Center, a permanent institution alongside New York

- Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera and New York City Ballet.
- Wins the Pulitzer Prize for Music for the oratorio, Blood On The Fields, in 1997
- Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra gets a new home, the Frederick P. Rose Hall which is built

- specifically for jazz, in 2004.
- France confers the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, the country’s highest order of merit, on him in 2009.
- United States President Barack Obama awards him The National Humanities Medal in 2015.

CultureVulture

Darkness lurks in children's literature

Revisiting the stories written by Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton, one finds cruelty, spite, racism and sexism in the tales



Toh Wen Li

While rummaging through a cupboard at home recently, I stumbled across some old paperbacks by Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton.

These two authors were responsible for countless hours of unadulterated joy while I was growing up – and so I decided the best thing to do would be to shatter my childhood illusions by revisiting them with all the hard scrutiny of a cynical adult.

Dahl's books, as expected, hadn't grown as stale as Blyton's. Leafing through his books as an adult, I gained some new insights.

His narrators, to my surprise, don't just relish describing scenes of cruelty and spite – they have a talent for it.

In Matilda (1988), for example, there is a scene where the tyrannical headmistress Miss Trunchbull lifts a pupil up from the floor by his ears. Speaking with glee, she says she is certain his ears have been damaged permanently.

"Eric's ears will have stretched quite considerably in the last couple of minutes! They'll be much longer now than they were before. There's nothing wrong with that... It'll give him an interesting pixie look for the rest of his life."

To a child, Miss Trunchbull might seem like a brutal, inchoate monster – but as an adult, I'm

struck by how finely Dahl describes her spite.

Then there is The Twits (1980), whose title characters are a husband and wife who play nasty tricks on each other.

The revolting couple somehow end up glued headfirst to the floor, and after days of being upside down, their heads shrink into their necks and their necks into their bodies, which finally disappear so only their clothes are left.

When I had the book read to me at the age of six, I was fascinated by the idea of turning a house upside down by gluing all its furniture to the ceiling. It never occurred to me, not until recently, to see the Twits as malicious or feel sorry for them.

Could "cruelty" in fiction seem less shocking to young readers because they already live in a world where everything seems monstrous and terrifying? Could the powerlessness of childhood make children desire the humiliation of others – fictional villains included – as a way to cope with their own vulnerability?

Dahl had a wonderful imagination and a lively style. And his most sympathetic adult characters often have a child-like excitement about them – note how he often uses the verb "cried", more animated than "said", when they are speaking.

One vital ingredient of Dahl's writing was his dark sense of humour. The stories wouldn't have worked half as well with children if they weren't so terribly wicked.

The late American illustrator Maurice Sendak didn't like Dahl at all. "The cruelty in his books is off-putting. Scary guy," said the then 83-year-old in his final Guardian interview. "I know he's very popular, but what's nice about this guy? He's dead, that's what's nice about him."

Dahl's "cruelty", however, makes sense when we consider Sendak's own salient observation about

how complicated children are.

"There's a cruelty to childhood, there's an anger."

I've come to realise that another reason Dahl's stories went down so well with children is that his powerful child protagonists often have anger brimming inside them – and which child doesn't? Think Matilda, who moves objects with her mind, and the girl in The Magic Finger who turns her neighbours into winged creatures.

Happily, Dahl's popularity has endured, buoyed by television and stage adaptations such as Matilda The Musical, which comes to Singapore on Thursday.

Another popular – if divisive – children's writer was Enid Blyton, who wrote more than 600 books for children in her lifetime.

Unlike Dahl, she paints a sunny picture of a world of middle-class children who go on adventures, visit the seaside and dig into generous helpings of scones with lashings of ginger beer.

They were probably just as much an escapist fantasy for me – a child growing up in the 1990s halfway across the world – as they were for British readers in the 1940s, who were living in the throes of World War II.

While Blyton's books have thrilled generations of children, they have also been lambasted for their cardboard characters, limited vocabulary and mechanical quality.

People have rightly objected to the shades of class snobbery, racism and sexism in the stories – The Three Golliwogs (1944), about three characters named Golly, Woggie and Nigger, being one particularly offensive example.

Blyton, who was born in Victorian England in 1897 and died in 1968, could credit her commercial success (offensive "isms" aside) to the very factors underlying the criticism: The repetitive nature of her work is precisely what speaks to a child's

desire for comfort and familiarity. Reading her books, you know you are in safe territory.

Armchair psychologists have suggested that Blyton was good at writing for children because she was, in many ways, like a child herself, underneath the public veneer which she carefully polished right down to her famous signature.

Her younger daughter Imogen found her approach to life "quite childlike... She could also sometimes be almost spiteful like a teenager".

The BBC's fascinating biopic of the author, Enid (2009), suggests that as an adult, Blyton still suffered from the trauma of her parents' divorce. Played by Helena Bonham Carter, she is depicted as an emotionally stunted woman who hides from the unpleasant things in life.

We also learn that she had an underdeveloped womb – like that of a 13-year-old girl – and had to receive hormone injections before giving birth to her daughters.

Then came the infidelities, divorces and remarriages, and Blyton's alleged attempts to not only stop her former husband from seeing their children, but also ruin his career.

Literature undergraduates with a psychoanalytical bent would have a field day with Blyton if they weren't so busy turning up their noses at her.

Still, what does this all mean for the rest of us? Why all this fuss over children's books – let alone children's authors?

If I've learnt one thing from this exercise, it is that even though Dahl and Blyton's stories are often funny and jolly, darkness – be it on the page or in their lives – was never far off.

The refuge one finds in literature can only ever be temporary.

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Could "cruelty" in fiction seem less shocking to young readers because they already live in a world where everything seems monstrous and terrifying? Could the powerlessness of childhood make children desire the humiliation of others – fictional villains included – as a way to cope with their own vulnerability?



(From far left) Pu Cunxin plays Claudius and the Ghost; Lu Fang plays Queen Gertrude and Ophelia; and Hu Jun plays Hamlet, in The Tragedy Of Hamlet, Prince Of Denmark. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ESPLANADE – THEATRES ON THE BAY

Hamlet breaks with tradition without losing richness

REVIEW/ THEATRE

THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Beijing Li Liuyi Theatre Studio
Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts
Esplanade Theatre
Last Friday

Olivia Ho

To soliloquy or not to soliloquy? That is the question for Beijing director Li Liuyi's Mandarin take on William Shakespeare's celebrated revenge tragedy Hamlet.

"To be or not to be" is a speech so iconic that it can often overshadow the scene it is in.

Li makes the bold choice of not only diluting this existential soliloquy, but also mixing it in counterpoint with the speech of Ophelia, Hamlet's hapless lover, bemoaning

how he has changed.

This is a play that foregrounds relationships.

Li's Hamlet is magnificent. At more than three hours long, it is also something of a marathon. The test is whether you can make five acts of one man's indecision compelling – this play passes with flying colours.

Michael Simon's stunning set, with arresting, almost cosmic lighting by Deng Wen, turns and tilts ominously, conveying the "out of joint" atmosphere of a Denmark deranged.

Above it hangs a great silver sphere of tangled metal, like the "nutshell... of infinite space" that Hamlet speaks of. A clear visual metaphor for emotional baggage, the sphere follows him around the set and, at times, lowers itself as if to crush him.

The cast navigate the stage's constant shifts in William Chang's

rustic, sweeping costumes with long trains, accompanied from the sidelines by the eerie shriek and whine of a jinghu, a bowed string instrument, and the haunting vocals of singer Juijiu, the 17-year-old daughter of the two leads.

Hu Jun is a commanding presence as the Prince of Denmark, racked by indecision over how to kill his uncle Claudius, who murdered his father – both played by Pu Cunxin in a canny, but unshowy performance.

Best known in the mainstream for his roles in blockbuster action films such as Red Cliff (2008) and Bodyguards And Assassins (2009), Hu brings a brooding, martial presence to the character, which comes to the fore in the finale's thrilling sword fight.

Yet he also displays unexpected comic chops in scenes such as when he pretends to be mad and needlessly bumbling old courtier Polo-

nus (a very droll Li Shilong).

But he is more than matched by actress Lu Fang, his wife in real life, who plays both Ophelia and Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude, now married to Claudius.

Lu uses no obvious tells in distinguishing the two characters – neither costume changes nor tone of voice – yet her performance is so masterful that one can tell which one she is even if she is simply walking across the stage.

At times, she plays both characters in the same scene, shifting in a heartbeat between innocence and worldliness, maidenhood and maternity.

Having Gertrude and Ophelia played by the same person introduces shades of irony into some of Hamlet's lines, especially his harping on the "incestuous sheets" of his mother's remarriage to his uncle.

There are clear parallels in the

way he treats both Gertrude and Ophelia, which is to say obsessively and borderline abusively.

The play is attuned to the turmoils of both women, even if it is not able to empower them without the invention of new material.

The script, translated by Li Jianming as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's ambitious Shakespeare Folio Translation Project, forgoes some of the intricacies of the original's wordplay in order to distil the meaning of the lines into a clear, supple translation.

Some of her best work is, unsurprisingly, the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which die-hard Shakespeareans will be glad to hear is delivered in its entirety at the end of the play by a Hamlet risen from the dead.

Li Liuyi may have broken with tradition on many points, but does he honour the richness of the original? That is no question.



Late Company stars (from far left) Edward Choy, Janice Koh, Xander Pang, Karen Tan and Adrian Pang. PHOTO: CRISPAN CHAN

Not too late to talk

Pangdemonium's Late Company aims to start conversations on tough topics such as teen suicide and bullying

Akshita Nanda
Arts Correspondent

Pangdemonium's latest play hides a dark pun in its title: Late Company. Tensions are high as guests are delayed arriving at a dinner party, but the hosts are also mourning their dead son, who killed himself a year before.

The play, which runs at the Victoria Theatre from Friday to March 10, explores family relationships, teen suicide and the hazard of interpersonal disconnect in real life, despite increased connections on social media.

Based on the shocking 2011 case of a bullied Ottawa teen who killed himself, the script by Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill is startlingly relevant to Singapore.

One in nine adolescents here have been victims of cyber bullying. About 40 per cent of those bullied have turned into online tormentors themselves, according to a large-scale study by the Singapore Children's Society and Institute of Mental Health in 2014.

Singapore had the second-highest rate of cyber bullying worldwide – 58 per cent – according to a 2012 Microsoft study, ranking just after China. Learning this “just blew my mind”, says Adrian Pang, who is joint artistic director of Pangdemonium with his wife, Tracie Pang.

In Late Company, directed by Tracie, Adrian plays Bill, whose son Curtis may have been responsible for the death of another teen. Edward Choy and Janice Koh play the dead teen's parents, Michael and Debora, who hope to find

answers and closure by having Curtis and his family over to dinner.

The question is why Bill, his wife Tamara (Karen Tan) and Curtis accepted the invitation in the first place. As the conversation becomes more charged, why don't they just get up and go?

Adrian says: “For Tamara and Bill, there's an element of being very protective of their son. In a way, they're there on the defensive and offensive as well.”

Tan adds: “Curtis is also the subject of trolls now. When is the punishment enough?”

Curtis is played by 19-year-old Xander Pang, son of Adrian and Tracie. “He had to look like one of the parents,” jokes Tan.

The Pangs clarify that Xander was the only teen on the shortlist who did not have exams or national

service scheduled during the play's run.

Has he ever experienced cyber bullying? No, but he knows it happens and that he is lucky.

“I've just been raised with thick skin,” he says, adding, “I've been surrounded by people who are comfortable with themselves and I'm comfortable with myself. For a lot of teenage boys especially, it's quite hard to find who you are as a person and what you want to be.”

Good parenting and a supportive social circle help, but Late Company addresses the fact that, sometimes, teens who seem to have everything are still driven to take their own lives – or hurt others.

Tracie speaks of friends who have a child who commits self-harm. “It kills the parents and it's not their fault. They try to intervene. It's not

as simple as there's one problem (to address).”

Tan says: “It can be very hurtful when you think you have done the most you can for your child and he or she still hurts herself or does these things. You ask why?”

Koh, who plays the grieving mother, says it is even worse when a teen kills himself. “People feel like it's contagious. But it's a topic worth exploring and talking about.”

Rather than give answers, Pangdemonium wants to start conversations about difficult topics. Tracie adds that the stigma around talking about suicide comes from a feeling of personal responsibility. “What does it say about you that you did not know that person was close to the edge?”

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BOOK IT / LATE COMPANY

WHERE: Victoria Theatre, 9 Empress Place
WHEN: Friday to March 10; Tuesdays to Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 3 and 8pm, Sundays, 3pm (additional 8pm show on March 10)
ADMISSION: \$25 to \$75 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)
INFO: Advisory 16 (mature content)

Romance in a love letter to mathematics

Toh Wen Li

Watching a professor scribble maths equations onto a whiteboard is not something you would usually expect to see in a theatre.

But one drama production at the National University of Singapore (NUS) will begin with several minutes of an actor doing just that – her lecture setting the stage for an intricately patterned story about love and the beauty of numbers.

A Disappearing Number, originally by British theatre group Complicite, will run for one night, on March 15, as part of NUS' upcoming maths-themed arts festival.

This Singapore staging of the acclaimed play is directed by theatre stalwart Edith Podesta.

“It's a love letter to mathematics through the language of love,” says the 39-year-old. “The audience isn't just going to see dry maths. They are going to see a love affair, faith and friendship.”

A Disappearing Number was conceived and originally directed by Complicite's founder Simon McBurney. It premiered at the Theatre Royal Plymouth in 2007 and won the Critics' Circle Theatre and Laurence Olivier awards for Best New Play.

It has two interwoven narratives. The first is based on a true story. In 1913, the self-taught mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, a clerk in Chennai, sends Cambridge maths lecturer G.H. Hardy a letter filled with groundbreaking theorems. The two men develop an intellectual kinship, a collaboration Hardy regarded as the one romantic incident of his life.

Meanwhile, in the present, mathematics professor Ruth (Koh Wan Ching) and hedge fund manager Al (Pavan J. Singh) fall in love.

In the play, numerous voice-overs suggest how different times



and places exist parallel to each other.

The Singapore production also features live tabla music by Nawaz Mirajkar and projections of hand-written equations – from Ramanujan's old letters and notebooks – that will be animated by multimedia artist Brian Gothong Tan.

A Disappearing Number is not just about love and maths, says Podesta. It is also about the Indian diaspora and faith.

“(Ramanujan) said that at night, he would pray... His goddess would put mathematics on the tip of his tongue and he would just write from there, which is why he had no (mathematical) proofs.”

The NUS Arts Festival, from March 15 to 23, is in its 14th year. Past editions have explored topics such as quantum physics and dystopias.

In A Disappearing Number, professional actors Koh, Singh and Remesh Panicker – who plays a

physicist called Aninda – will be joined by cast members from the university drama group NUS Stage.

To get their heads around lines as perplexing as “there are countable infinities and uncountable infinities”, the director and cast sat down with NUS maths professor Chan Heng Huat for a three-hour lesson.

Prof Chan, Podesta adds, helped shed light on certain scenes, such as when Al asks Ruth if she wants children and she replies, cryptically: “One plus a half plus a quarter plus an eighth plus a sixteenth and so on, which in infinity sums to two.”

Ramanujan died in 1920 aged 32. He may be long gone, but his maths is still used today and his genius is the subject of films such as The Man Who Knew Infinity (2015).

“The maths is real, but everything in our lives is transitory,” Podesta adds. “For me, trying to understand that kind of genius is unfathomable – but I can understand his love, his passion, his creativity.”

A Disappearing Number stars (from left) Pavan J. Singh, Koh Wan Ching and Remesh Panicker. PHOTO: TET PHOTOGRAPHY

BOOK IT / A DISAPPEARING NUMBER

WHERE: University Cultural Centre Hall, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent, National University of Singapore
WHEN: March 15, 8pm
ADMISSION: \$25 & \$15 (students)
INFO: For more information or to buy tickets, go to www.nus.edu.sg/cfa/NAF_2019/event-disappearing-number.html

Hear ST readers' love stories



Tune in to ST podcast Life Picks, in which Life reporters highlight the best films, concerts, restaurants and arts events.

This week, Life reporter Olivia Ho (right) and host Melissa Sim (left) read six love stories, each 200 words or fewer, which were sent in by readers and published in The Sunday Times on Feb 10 in celebration of Valentine's Day.

We received more than 150 entries. Thank you for writing in and we hope you enjoy our picks.

ST PHOTO: ERNEST LUIS



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Home-grown horror tales come to life

A live adaptation of local writer Russell Lee's True Singapore Ghost Stories series is part of this year's Textures literary festival

Desiree Loh

When people are ushered into the dimly lit Play Den at The Arts House on the night of March 9, they will be greeted by the sight of a lone woman sitting on the ground, surrounded by candles, an apple, a mirror and a knife.

That solitary figure is renowned storyteller Kamini Ramachandran, 49, who for the next 15 minutes, will bring to life the spine-tingling tale of young girls who engage in a supernatural ritual in the hope of discovering their soulmate, to shocking consequences.

The performance is part of A Night Of Terrifying Tales – a five-part live adaptation of stories from home-grown writer Russell Lee's iconic True Singapore Ghost Stories series – produced by MoonShadow Stories for this year's Textures literary festival from March 7 to 10.

Ms Kamini, founder and director of MoonShadow Stories, says the session is a gateway into Singapore literature.

"I'm using Russell's books as inspiration. I've completely adapted the stories and done things like amalgamating two stories into one, so definitely, the stepping point is through True Singapore Ghost Stories as a canon of work."

Co-commissioned by The Arts House and #BuySingLit and supported by the National Arts Council, the sophomore outing of the literary festival will feature more than 45 programmes centred

on the Singapore literary scene.

Ms Lisa Lip, senior manager of programmes at The Arts House and producer of Textures, says: "We tried to programme with a wide audience in mind, so there is something for people who've never been to an arts festival, those who've had to read only one book of Singapore literature in school, and regular attendees of arts festivals."

For example, there will be exhibitions based on local works for festivalgoers who prefer visual art, and stage adaptations of Singapore literature for those who enjoy theatrical productions.

One such stage production is Samping, part of Spare Room Productions' The Page On Stage series.

Adapted from Singapore poet Cyril Wong's short story The Mistake, the one-man play will take the audience on a young Malay boy's journey through bereavement and persecution, and his first steps into manhood.

For playwright and director M. Raihan Halim, the production was his first time adapting something for the stage. The 37-year-old is usually known for his television work.

"It was scary. I felt totally out of my element as I'd never written anything that didn't have editing or cinematography involved. I did, however, have a lot of fun," he says.

Raihan chose to adapt the short story because it moved him.

"It's strange because the events in the short story didn't happen to me, but I somehow felt the pain, sadness and embarrassment that the character went through," he says.

The play also ties in with the festival's theme of Love And Loss (and some things in between).

"As we follow the character's journey, we experience grief, longing and affliction with him. It's also a personal journey for each individual as he connects with the play, taking away with him his interpretation of it," he adds.

For Ms Lip, this is exactly what the festival's theme embodies.

"In times of these heightened



Renowned storyteller Kamini Ramachandran will regale the audience with the story of young girls who take part in a supernatural ritual in the hope of finding their soulmate.

PHOTO: ARTS HOUSE LIMITED

BOOK IT / TEXTURES 2019

WHERE: The Arts House, 1 Old Parliament Lane

WHEN: March 7 to 10, various times

ADMISSION: Free and ticketed programmes

INFO: www.theartshouse.sg

emotions (of love and loss), sometimes, turning to words can help us.

"Whether it's writing or reading the story of someone going through something similar, it helps us cope and make sense of our world," she says.

"All of this is found in Singapore literature. It's wonderful to read international writers, but our writers are writing in situations that we can relate to, with language that we can relate to, so I think it's more comforting."

desloh@sph.com.sg

Pleasing paeon to the Year of the Pig

REVIEW / CONCERT

HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR CONCERT

Ding Yi Music Company/
Chinese Cultural Centre Theatre/
Last Sunday

Chang Tou Liang

One simply cannot escape the various shades of crimson that formed the backdrop to Ding Yi Music Company's annual Chinese New Year concert, the chamber counterpart to Singapore Chinese Orchestra's musical festivities.

Young conductor Dedric Wong Deli led the raucous but pleasing proceedings with works which could be sub-divided into three genres: festive music coloured with local, popular or modern influences; spectacular concertante works; and gaudily orchestrated pop songs.

The first group needs some getting used to.

For example, the ubiquitous Xi Yang Yang hardly gains any traction in the guise of bossa nova despite some fine playing from the suona family.

Similarly, Da Di Hui Chun

becomes a parody when Malay and Indian drumming dominates the rhythms.

The exception was Yu Le Fu's adaptation of Cantonese tune Yu Le Shen Ping (Joyous Celebration), with Chin Yen Choong and Fred Chan on the rarely heard zhutiqin and erxian respectively, which provided a rousing prelude.

Here, even the pop drum-set injecting a more contemporary feel did not get in the way of its fulsome felicitations.

More satisfying were the concertante pieces featuring Ding Yi's members as soloists.

Chua Yew Kok on the pipa in Jiang Ying's Limitless was a slow boil, building up from its ethnic tribal flavoured opening, full of calm and contemplation, to a rugged and spirited close.

Not to be outdone, Jacky Ng's suona soared in Phang Kok Jun's arrangement of the familiar classic, Hundreds Of Birds Paying Homage To The Phoenix.

When one thought heights of virtuosity could not be further scaled, the improvisatory reed hit stratospheric reaches with eardrum-piercing volumes to match.

Coming back to earth, guzheng exponent Yvonne Tay was just as

excellent in Liu Chang's Rippling Brook Capriccio, a fantasy on the popular Yunnan love song, Xiao He Tang Shui.

All this did not seem the least bit surprising, as the audience was witnessing some of the nation's best young soloists.

The third and final genre was the realm of popular songs, in which Ding Yi provided sympathetic and classy accompaniment to two local Mandopop stars.

Jarrell Huang was a veritable livewire in Lee Wei Song's Soaring Against The Wind, FIR's First Day and Sandy Lam's Love Never Leaves, swinging and air-strumming his microphone stand with wild abandon, while egging on the audience to clap along.

Somewhat more subdued was Bonnie Loo, who helmed a Jay Chou Love Suite, a medley of songs which included Rainbow, Love Confession and Starry Mood.

Then, she switched to the Minnan dialect for Call My Name by Eric Moo, which no doubt gave Hokkien speakers in the audience some smiles.

The final song, seasonal super-market staple Bai Nian, was sung by both singers, closing the concert on a prosperous and satisfying high.

Celebrate the Art of Living and Leaving Well



The author, Dr William Wan, General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement, will share his unique insights from his book, THROUGH THE VALLEY, on how people can age gracefully.



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BON VOYAGE



Top picks in Western Australia

Michelle Chin goes on a six-day road trip to explore Perth, Albany and Denmark

1 Personalised city tour in Perth

Some travellers prefer having the freedom to get around on their own, but I feel that being on a guided tour — on foot — can fully maximise your time actually doing what you prefer. Although the itinerary for my group was already planned for this sponsored trip, it can be customised to suit the preferences of everyone in the group.

Any bar hoppers, street art enthusiasts or sea view admirers in your group? Let your guide know and plans can be made to accommodate your interests.

My group embarked on a two-and-a-half-hour walking tour that covered Perth's Yagan Square, Elizabeth Quay and various places showcasing quirky street art.

Our local guide kept us rapt with nuggets of trivia on the history,



Top: Cityscape of Perth in Western Australia. Above: Street art in Perth.
PHOTOS: ISTOCK, MICHELLE CHIN

geography, dining areas, arts, libraries and more.

She had an answer to whatever we asked about, and her recommendations were great.

We took her suggestion to visit Caballitos, a bar that is popular for its margarita slushies and tequila cocktails along Queen Street. It is tucked away in a semi-dim basement with an ambience that borders on eerie. There were plenty of red lighting and sinister-looking skulls lining the bar counters and walls. I thought the quirky decor added to the relaxing yet somewhat electrifying environment.

By the time we left after enjoying some drinks, I could imagine myself to be a regular of Caballitos, celebrating Friday nights and hosting birthday parties there.

CONTINUED ON D8

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BON VOYAGE



CONTINUED FROM D7

Top picks in Western Australia

2 Immersive art at Mount Clarence

The Field of Light: Avenue of Honour (www.fieldoflightbany.com.au) at Mount Clarence was a visual treat.

We visited it at night, walking past 16,000 illuminated green, white and gold glass spheres that lit up the ground like glowing wildflowers.

I felt like an astronaut navigating a galaxy irradiated with stars. It was almost like an extraterrestrial experience. I was spellbound by the magical sights. It was definitely an Instagram-worthy place.

But on a pensive note, the art installation is commemorating the sacrifice of about 41,000 Australian and New Zealand Army Corps

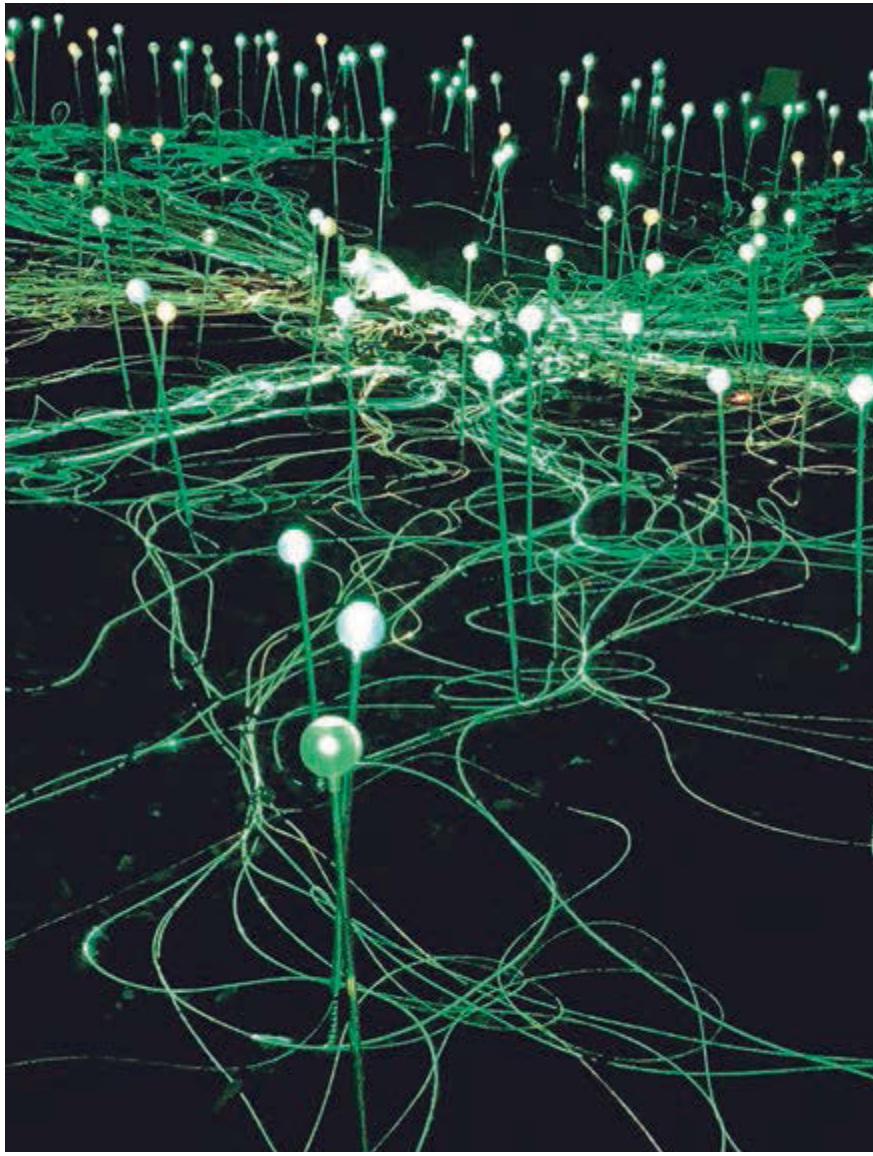
(ANZAC) soldiers who fought in World War I.

The concept was inspired by the wildflower season when the troops departed Western Australia for the war.

The art installation was the brainchild of British artist Bruce Munro, and the ANZAC's sacrifices set its backdrop and narrative.

It offers many things that symbolises and celebrates bravery, endurance, honour, hope and the importance of peace.

It also evoked peace, melancholy, admiration and awe in me all at once. It opens from sunset to 10pm daily, till April 28.



Glass spheres of the Field of Light Avenue of Honour at Mount Clarence.



3 Nature's paradise at the Valley of the Giants

I love treetop walks and nature reserves, even in humid Singapore. So imagine my joy when I reached the Tree Top Walk at the Valley of the Giants (www.valleyofthegiants.com.au) in Denmark.

The November weather was cool and sunny — perfect for this activity.

Suspended at about 40m high, the 600m-long Tree Top Walk offers awesome views of the works of Mother Nature as I gazed down on the dense canopies of majestic trees.

The lush environment was peaceful, but my heart was anything but still. Trekking at such a height was exhilarating.

The walk brought to my mind

scenes in the movies Tarzan and The Jungle Book, where greenery was important to their plots.

My mind was active with childish imagination, as I secretly imagined how wondrous it would be to morph into an agile monkey where the canopy is a playground.

The red tingle trees are the "show" stealers.

With a grey-reddish bark and a base circumference that can grow up to a whopping 20m, this tree may grow for more than 400 years and reach a height of 75m.

If you are lucky, you may spot animals such as the quokka which is a macropod the size of a house cat, or the western rosella which is a brightly coloured parrot endemic to southern Western Australia.

The Tree Top Walk at the Valley of the Giants.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK, MICHELLE CHIN

4 Gastronomic delights at The Lake House

I've always thought that a place — that has everything you need in the countryside — like The Lake House (www.lakehousedenmark.com.au) in Denmark only exists in fairytales: a quaint café cum restaurant, surrounded by a lake, blue skies, fluffy clouds and lush greenery.

The establishment has a cellar door, restaurant, café and vinofood gourmet store under one roof. Its ambience is warm and inviting; the setting, simply wonderful.

I managed to get a seat with a great view of the lake as I enjoyed the wine and shared platters of smoked chicken, leg ham, Italian cacciatore sausage, vegetable frittata, seasonal dip, antipasto bowl, vinofood condiments as well as a cheese board with cheddar, brie, wine jelly, semillon pickled pears, chutney and wafers.

I also enjoyed the whimsical He Said She Said Lifestyle Wines that target young-at-heart consumers. Its range of wines include Cabernet Merlot, Shiraz, Cabernet, Rose, Sauvignon Blanc Semillon and Premium White, with labels that are playful, cheeky, humorous and offbeat.

If you tend to get lost about what to buy for loved ones or friends,



Enjoy a platter of meats, egg frittata, chutneys, cheeses and more at The Lake House.

check out its vinofood products that include a wide variety of jams and jellies, chutneys and relishes, vinegars and dressings, antipasto and syrups. All of them are handmade in small batches in The Lake House's commercial kitchen.

The writer's trip was sponsored by Tourism Western Australia and Dynasty Travel.

Find out more about the Dynasty Travel Unique Perth + South West Australia experience at Booth 6H01 of the NATAS Travel 2019 at Halls 5 and 6A at Singapore Expo from Feb 22 to 24, 10am to 9.30pm.

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BON VOYAGE



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PHOTO: CHAN BROTHERS

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PHOTO: CELEBRITY CRUISES

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With a rousing theme like this, NATAS Travel 2019 is set to offer impeccable promotions and travel ideas from Friday to Sunday, 10am to 9.30pm at the Singapore EXPO Halls 5 and 6A.

Visitors can expect over 80 exhibitors across 700 booths set up by airlines, cruise operators, hotels and resorts, national tourism organisations, travel agents and other travel-related companies.

There will also be various activities, attractive lucky draw prizes and exciting stage performances.

With an increasingly competitive travel and tourism landscape, NATAS is aiming for sustainable growth this year.

As the association is also celebrating its 40th anniversary, visitors to the fair can join its fund-raising campaign for Mercy Relief, a local humanitarian non-governmental organisation that was



PHOTO: NATAS

adopted as part of its corporate social responsibility.

Visit www.natas.travel for more information.

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✓Carcassonne - 19th-century Medieval Citadel
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10D ITALY SAN MARINO + CINQUE TERRE ESFA10
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✓Ascend to the 2nd level of the Eiffel Tower (Entrance included)
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12D WONDROUS '4 FJORDS' SCANDINAVIA ESSC12
Sweden/Norway/Denmark
✓Stockholm: Cathedral, Royal Palace, Drottningholm Palace
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→Dep: Apr - Oct
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14D THE BEST OF SPAIN + PORTUGAL + GIBRALTAR ESSP14
Barcelona/Valencia/Granada/Costa del Sol/Seville/Salamanca/Segovia/Madrid/Toledo/Zaragoza/Sevilla/Fatima/Gibraltar
→Dep: Apr - Oct
fr\$3199*

13D SCENIC EUROPE ESCP13
Italy/Switzerland/France
✓GIACIER 3000: World Highest Alpine Coast - Featuring the First and Only Suspension Bridge to Connect 2 Mountain Peaks
✓Unlimited Snow Tobogganing Fun
✓Ascend to the 2nd level of the Eiffel Tower (Entrance included)
→Dep: Apr - Oct
fr\$2799*

14D BALKAN EXPLORER + MILAN ESSB14
Italy/Croatia/Bosnia and Herzegovina/Montenegro/Slovenia
✓Pula - Pula Arena, Temple Of Augustus
✓Zadar - One of its kind Sea Organ, City Walls, "Greeting to the Sun", Old Town
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9D Reimagine North Korea With UFM100.3 DJ Wenhong
★ 1N Stay at Maskryong Ski Resort
★ With 2hr Ski Lesson & Panmunjom DMZ
★ Pyongyang Metro Train Ride
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10D Iran - Land of the Great Persian Empire
★ Stay at 4 & 5★ Hotels ★ Nasir al Molk Mosque ★ Persepolis
★ Fire Temple ★ Chelak Soutan Palace
★ Fin Garden ★ Golestan Palace
Dep: Apr 16 May 21 Jun 18 Jul 16 Aug 13 Sep 17
fr\$3498

9D Golden Route of India + Kashmir
★ Taj Mahal ★ Baby Taj ★ Agra Fort ★ Amber Fort
★ Hawa Mahal ★ Jantar Mantar ★ Chokhi Dhani ★ Ghandi Smriti
★ Bahai Temple ★ India Gate ★ Swaminarayan Akshardham
Dep: Apr - Dec
fr\$1698

6D Classical India
★ Taj Mahal ★ Agra Fort ★ Chand Baori
★ Amber Fort ★ Hawa Mahal ★ Chokhi Dhani
★ India Gate
Dep: Apr 3 May 1 Oct 8,22 Nov 12,26 Dec 3,10,17
fr\$1798

10D Inside Mythical North Korea
★ Stay at Maskryong Ski Resort With 2hr Ski Lesson ★ Pyongyang Metro Train Ride
★ Panmunjom DMZ
Dep: Feb - Jun
fr\$2346

Private Tours (2 to Go, Daily Departure)

5D Charming Kerala
Dep: Feb - Sep
fr\$1298

7D Majestic Rajasthan With Taj Mahal
Dep: Feb - Sep
fr\$1748

7D Gujarat - Jewel in the West
Dep: Feb - May
fr\$2298

10D Buddhist Trails & Varanasi
Dep: Feb - Sep
fr\$1948

All prices are subjected to associated taxes & surcharges correct at time of print & subject to change fr\$0 to \$550. All information is correct at time of print.

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Mon - Fri 10am - 7pm Sat 10am - 6pm
This Sun 11am - 6pm (TA 109)

ASIA GLOBAL VACATION 6704 9199
101 Upper Cross Street #02-56 People's Park Centre
Mon - Fri 11am - 8pm Sat 11am - 7pm
Sun & PH 1pm - 7pm (TA 1549)

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2nd Pax FLIES FREE
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7D FLORAL HOKKAIDO
Noboribetsu / Otaru / Asahikawa / Biei / Furano / Sapporo
• 2-Nights Onsen Hotels
• Visit 2 famous flower fields
• Penguin Parade & Dolphin Show
• Glass Bottom Boat Experience
• 2-Nights Onsen Hotels
• Blue Pond & Shirahata Waterfall
Dep: Apr - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$2698** 2nd pax **fr\$1349***

6D Japan Alpine Route
Asahikawa / Tateyama / Kanazawa / Gifu / Kusatsu / Matsumoto / Tokyo
• 1-Night Onsen in Kusatsu
• Japan No.1 Onsen
• Free Kanazawa Gold Leaf Ice-Cream
• Ashikaga Flower Park
• Experience Snow Wall
• Shirakawa-go
• Bukichon Hanok Village
• Kawagoe Old Street
Dep: Apr - Jun 2019
1st pax **fr\$1998***

7D Charming Central Japan
• 1-Night Nagano Onsen Hotel
• Mt Kachi Kachi Ropeway
• Sagano Romantic Train Ride
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$2598*** 2nd pax **fr\$1299***

7D Amazing Kyushu
• 3-Nights Onsen Hotel
• Mt Inasa Ropeway
• Hot sand bath
• Sakurajima
Dep: Apr - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$2198***

7/8D Family Fun In Korea
• Jimjilbang Experience
• Everland Theme Park
• Seongsu Ichibang Peak
• Play K-POP Museum
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1498*** 2nd pax **fr\$749***

7D Allure of Korea
• Nami Island with boat ride
• Hanbok Dress-Up Photography Sessi
• Mt Seorak with cable car ride
• 1-day free and easy in Seoul
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$988***

7/8D Dazzling Korea
Jeju / Busan / Daegu / Yeongju / Pyeongchang / Dunnae / Seoul
• DIY Bilibili Making Session + Seopjikoji
• Jeonsangjeolli Cliff + Gamcheon Culture Village
• DIY Cheese Making & Sheep Feeding Session
• Seongsu Ichibang Peak
• Gamcheon Culture Village
• Bukichon Hanok Village
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1488*** 2nd pax **fr\$744***

8D Family Fun In Taiwan
• Boat Milking
• Animal Feeding
• Janfusu Rainbow Theatre Night Show
• Farm Activities
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$888*** 2nd pax **fr\$444***

7D Southern Taiwan + Xiao Liu Qiu
Taichung / Yunlin / Chiayi / Tainan / Kaohsiung / Pingtung / Xiao Liu Qiu / Taipei
• DIY Towel
• 1-Way High Speed Rail Experience
• Role Play Experience in Judicial Museum
• Heavenly Lantern Releasing
• Snail Alley
• Lin Department Store
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$788*** 2nd pax **fr\$550***

7D Taiwan Small Town Discovery
• Hot Spring Relaxation
• Distillery Tasting
• Salt Harvesting Experience
• Xi You Forest Leisure Walk
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$688***

Japan, Korea & Taiwan Tripping in English
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8D Central Japan
Osaka / Kyoto / Kanazawa / Hida / Mt Fuji Region / Tokyo
• Enjoy city views via Tokyo Cruise
• Gold Leaf painting experience
• 3 UNESCO site
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$2344***

7D Aomori + Hokkaido
Aomori / Hirotsaki / Hakodate / Mt Yotei / Otaru / Sapporo
• Inakadate rice paddy art*
• Bullet Train ride from Aomori to Hakodate
• Otaru canal boat ride
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$2094***

7/8D Korea and Jeju
Seoul / Jeju Island / Chuncheon / Gyeongju / Mount Seorak / Yongin / Nami Island
• The Garden of Morning Calm
• O'Sulloc Tea Museum
Dep: Apr - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$999***

8D Round Taiwan
Taippei / Yilan / Huailien / Taichung / Taichung / Tainan / Taichung
• E-DA Theme Park
• Taroko National Park
• East Coast train ride
Dep: Nov 2018 - Mar 2019
1st pax **fr\$794***

7D West Taiwan
Taichung / Alishan / Kaohsiung / Nantou / Taipei
• 1N Stay at Alishan • Indigo-dyeing workshop
• 1N hotsporing with personal hot spring facility in room
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$744***

11D Affordable Europe
Netherlands / Germany / Switzerland / France / Belgium
• Zaanse Schans, Church of Amsterdam, Royal Palace, National Monument, Cheese Farm, Canal Cruise, Dam Square
• Cologne Cathedral, Lake Titisee, Black Forest
• Lion Monument, Chapel Bridge, Bear Pit
• Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower, Place de la Concorde, Notre Dame Cathedral
• Manneken Pis, Atomium Tower, Grand Place
Dep: Apr - Oct 2019
1st pax **fr\$1698***

7/9D Golden Route of India + Kashmir
Chokhi Dhani, Amer Fort, Birta Mandir Temple, Jal Mahal, Hawa Mahal
• Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Itmad ud Daulah's Tomb
• Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple, Qutab Minar, Ghandi Smriti, India Gate
• Gulkarg, Shikara ride, Mughal Gardens
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1148***

7D Majestic Rajasthan with Taj Mahal
Delhi / Agra / Jodhpur / Jaipur / Jaipur
• Jaipur Fort
• Patwon ki Haveli
• Camel ride at Sam Sand Dunes
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1648***

7D Sri Lanka Culture
Dambulla / Sigiriya / Kandy / Nuwara Eliya / Colombo
• Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage
• Jeep Safari at Minneriya National Park
• Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic
• Odell Unlimited
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1468***

2/3/5N Genting Dream Singapore Cruise
Port of Call: Kuala Lumpur / Bintan Island / Phuket / Penang / Langkawi / Sunbeach / North Borneo / Brunei
Sailing: Feb - Oct 2019
1st pax **fr\$199***

3/4/5/7N Royal Caribbean Spice of Southeast Asia
Port of Call: Port Klang / Penang / Phuket / Langkawi / Bangkok
Sailing: Mar - Jun 2019
1st pax **fr\$599***

4/5N Royal Caribbean Spice of Southeast Asia
Port of Call: Port Klang / Penang / Langkawi / Phuket / Malacca
Sailing: Nov - Dec 2019
1st pax **fr\$451***

11D Iran - Land of the Great Persian Empire
Shiraz / Marvashat / Isfahan / Kashan / Qom / Tehran
• Pink Mosque, Shah Cheraigh Mausoleum
• Persepolis, Pasargadae
• Narin Castle, Figen Tower
• Golestan Palace, Azadi Tower
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$4398*** 2nd pax **fr\$2199***

5D Charming Kerala
Alleppey / Munnar / Kochi
• Stay in a private moving houseboat
• Chinese Fishing Nets
• St Francis Church
• Jewish Synagogue
• Tea Plantations
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1198***

10D Buddhist Trails & Varanasi
Sarnath / Bodhgaya / Rajgir / Nalanda / Kushinagar / Lumbini / Kapilavastu / Sravasti
• Boat ride on the Ganges
• Mahabodhi Temple, Sacred Tank
• Mahaparinirvana Temple
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1848***

6/8D Explore Nepal
Kathmandu / Bhaktapur / Chitwan / Pokhara
• Elephant back safari in Chitwan
• Boat ride on Phewa Lake
• Chitwan National Wildlife Reserve
• Canoe Ride / Jungle Hike
• Catch the sunrise at Sarangkot
Dep: Mar - Sep 2019
1st pax **fr\$1248***

2/3/4/5D BANGKOK / KHAO YAI / HUA HIN
Use of private car for 10 hours
1st pax **fr\$198***

5D Hanoi + Halong Bay Overnight Cruise
1st pax **fr\$388***

3/4D Busan / Jeju / Seoul Getaway
1st pax **fr\$398***

7D Hokkaido All Seasons
1 Day Otaru Bay Story Tour with Lunch
1st pax **fr\$698***

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Grand display of da Vinci's works

To mark the 500th year of the Renaissance master's death, museums and galleries are showing his works, including reproductions of his inventions

NEW YORK • This year marks the quincentennial of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, the Italian Renaissance master who died in May 1519.

To celebrate the prodigious polymath's life and work, museums are hosting special exhibitions and tour operators are taking travellers on da Vinci-inspired journeys across Western Europe.

In Britain, the Royal Collection Trust opened a nationwide exhibition of drawings, Leonardo Da Vinci: A Life In Drawing, this

month. Museums and galleries in 12 cities, from Belfast to Southampton, are each displaying 12 of da Vinci's drawings through May 6.

Then the entire collection will be shown, along with more than 50 additional drawings, at The Queen's Gallery, in Buckingham Palace, until Oct 13; this assemblage will form the largest exhibition of da Vinci's work in more than 65 years.

The exhibit's last leg, from Nov 22 until March 15 next year, will showcase 80 drawings at the Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The collection, curated to highlight the artist's varied interests from engineering to botany, "allows us to enter one of the greatest minds in history", said Mr Martin Clayton, head of prints and drawings for Royal Collection Trust.

Italy will celebrate its native son with honorary exhibits across the country, and one of the most com-

prehensive will be Leonardo Da Vinci: Drawing The Future, running from April 15 to July 14, at the Royal Museums of Turin.

More than 50 drawings will be on display, including Codex On The Flight Of Birds and Face Of A Young Girl. The artist's famous Self Portrait will also be on show.

During a similar time period (April 19 to July 14), the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice will exhibit 25 drawings, including the rarely displayed masterwork Vitruvian Man, while the Sforza Castle in Milan is set to debut the newly restored Sala delle Asse room and show more of da Vinci's work on May 2, the anniversary of his death.

In Florence, the Palazzo Strozzi will unveil a retrospective showcasing 120 paintings, sculptures and drawings devoted to Renaissance maestro Andrea del Verrocchio; work from da Vinci and other pupils will be featured (March 9 to July 14).

In September, a curated version of the show will head to The National Gallery of Art in Washington. Also in the United States, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science's Leonardo Da Vinci: 500 Years Of Genius exhibit (March 1 to Aug 25) will present reproductions of da Vinci's inventions, historical enactors and the only 360-degree replica of the Mona Lisa ever made.

The Louvre Museum in Paris, which houses nearly a third of his surviving artwork, including the Mona Lisa, plans to show a retrospective of the artist's paintings starting on Oct 24.

"We want to illustrate how he placed utmost importance on painting," said Mr Vincent Delieuvin, an exhibit co-curator, "and how his investigation of the world, which he referred to as 'the science of painting', was the instrument of his art, seeking nothing less than to bring life to his paintings."

To explore these exhibits, other groundbreaking masterpieces and the places that shaped the artist's life and art, travel outfitters are organising tours across Western Europe.

Audley Travel is offering a customisable 12-day trip through Italy, France and Britain designed to provide insight into da Vinci's muses, peers and the socio-political climate of the Renaissance.

"We've created a trip that traces the full arc of da Vinci's lifetime, providing travellers a holistic and immersive look at his life and inspirations," said Ms Isabel Norman-Butler, a manager at the company.

Red Savannah recently launched a new series of European itineraries that can be tailored to highlight art historian-guided visits of The Last Supper in Milan and jaunts to da Vinci's birthplace in Tuscany that include private tours of Museo Leonardiano Vinci. NYTIMES

Victoria Beckham goes retro at London Fashion Week

LONDON • Exaggerated collars, leopard print and a strong colour palette: British designer Victoria Beckham turned to "pinches of the 1970s" as she showcased her latest collection on Sunday at London Fashion Week.

The former Spice Girl chose the rarified galleries of the Tate Britain museum, a neoclassical building home to some of the country's most treasured art, for her second catwalk show in the British capital.

"I have been thinking about what women want, about modern femininity," she told audiences in show notes describing her autumn/winter 2019 collection.

"There are touches of retro, pinches of the 70s. Yet it's all brought together into something encapsulating what we call the modern feminine alphabet," the 44-year-old said.

The audience was, as expected, packed with fashion industry celebrities, including Vogue magazine heavyweights Anna Wintour and Edward Enninful.

Meanwhile her family, from husband David Beckham to children Romeo, 16, Cruz, 13, and seven-year-old Harper, were in the front row to show their support.

Mrs Beckham celebrated a decade of her brand – previously exhibited only in New York – by showcasing in London for the first time, in autumn last year, in a homecoming of sorts.

"The studio is based here, as is our flagship store and I felt I wanted to continue to be a part of London Fashion Week," she told The Guardian of the decision to feature in Britain again.

This time around, the designer said she wanted to accentuate "lots of colour, lots of pattern" in her collection, with a bold palette ranging from absinth green to lipstick red, dusty pink to pale teal.

Tweeds, wools and silks were "matched and mismatched", in everything from blazers and trousers to sweaters and scarves, alongside a plethora of high-heeled boots, closed or open-toed.

"Throughout, there is a celebration of the inherent femininity of dresses – ideas of their past and proposals for the future," the designer explained in her show notes.

Despite being a respected figure in the fashion landscape, Mrs Beckham is still sailing in troubled financial waters, with losses for her eponymous fashion label rising to £10.3 million (\$\$18 million) for 2017, according to figures published in December. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

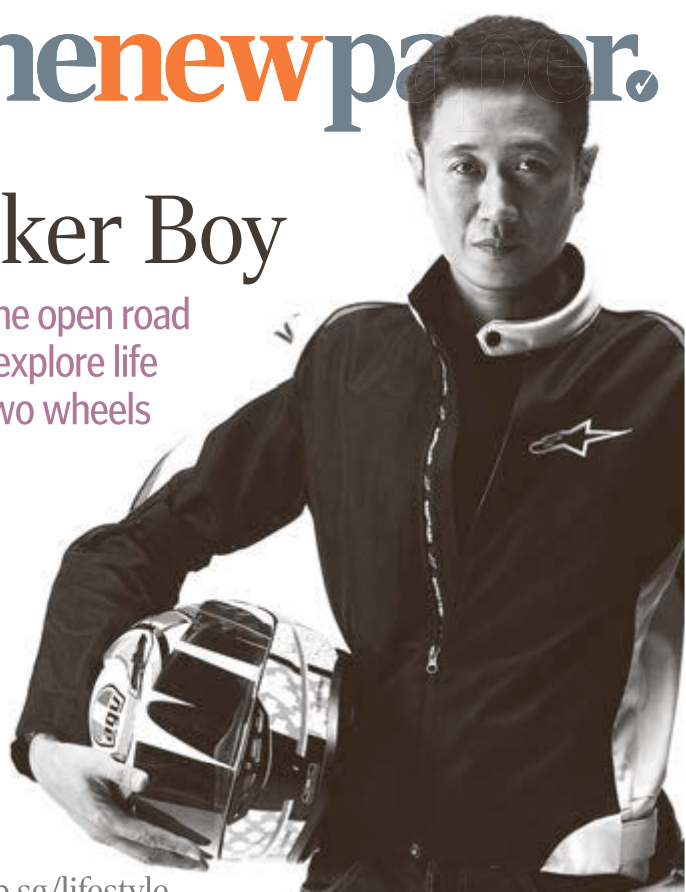


Victoria Beckham (above) and her creations (left and far left) on show at the London Fashion Week on Sunday. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

thenewpaper

Biker Boy

Hit the open road and explore life on two wheels



tnp.sg/lifestyle

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Lost in translation?

Tamil Murasu provides error-free translation from English to Tamil

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CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (PG) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
1.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 4 (SC)
2.30 Euromaxx (Cul)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)
4.00 Survivor 37 (PG) (V)
5.20 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.30 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (PG) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
7.30 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (CC) (V)
8.00 The Carbonaro Effect 4 (PG) (CC) (V)
8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5
9.30 Ask The Finance Minister 2019 (CA)
10.30 Love... And Other Bad Habits (PG) (M)
AM
12.10 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
12.40 Lion Moms (PG) (D)
1.40 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
2.30 Hawaii Five-0 7 (PG13) (D)
3.20 Lethal Weapon (PG13) (D)
4.10 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
4.40 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 What's In The Fridge? 2 (V)
7.00 Tastes Of Guang Dong (IE)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (News)
8.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)

10.00 Are You Up For It? (V)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 Taste With Jason 10 (IE)
1.00 News 8 At One (News)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Train Your Brain (HD) (S)
2.30 The Precedents (PG) (D)
3.30 The Golden Path (CC) (D)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 When Duty Calls (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (News)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 River Hongbao 2019 (CC) (V)
9.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 2017 (IE)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyounng (PG) (D)
1.00 Wonderful World 13 (V)
2.00 Fiery Passion (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Taiwan 1001 Stories (IE)
4.00 Taste From Home (CC) (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Girl Who Sees Smells (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Food Secrets (CC) (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 Food Secrets (CC) (IE)
AM
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.02 Market Insights: 2019's Multifaceted Investment Landscape
10.30 This Weekend
11.00 News Now
PM
1.02 Undercover Asia 6
2.00 News Now

4.02 Blueprint For Survival
5.00 News Now
7.02 Undercover Asia 6 (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 When We Play
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.02 Ask The Finance Minister 2019
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
1.02 When We Play
2.00 News Now
2.30 Asia Exposed
3.02 Blueprint For Survival
4.00 News Now
4.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
5.02 When We Play
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Anjaraipetti 5 (IE)
4.00 Priyasakhi (D)
4.30 Vasantham Express 5 (IE)
5.30 Mighty Raju Animation Series (S)
6.00 Raama Seetha (PG) (D)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam Varalaru (CC) (Cul)
7.30 Mella Thiranthatu Katavu 3 (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Adayaalam (CC) (Cul)
10.00 Rowthiram (PG13) (CC) (D)
10.30 Nijangal (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 Maalai Maalai Vasantham (V)
11.30 Tamil Seithi (Encore) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Justin Time (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Guess How Much I Love You (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (P)
11.00 Mouk (P)
11.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
PM
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)

12.30 Teddies (P)
1.00 Coconut The Little Dragon (P)
1.30 Justin Time (P)
2.00 Guess How Much I Love You (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (P)
3.00 Mouk (P)
3.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (S)
4.30 Shutterbugs (P)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Marcus Level (S)
6.00 The New Powerpuff Girls (S)
6.30 Museum Mysteries (S)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (CC) (S)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (CC) (S)
8.00 Turning Mecard (CC) (S)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (CC) (S)
9.00 ATP 250: New York Open 2019 (Sports) (Delayed)
11.00 Battle Of The Network Stars (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

PM
3.00 Juxbox Ekspres
4.00 Bibik-Bibikku (PG) (D)
5.00 Mak Cun 4 (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 Medic Kid (CC) (S)
6.30 Vanilla 2 (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Kek Champion (CC) (V) (Finale)
9.30 Rapuh (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Bingit (PG) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs;
CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture;
D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies;
P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance;
R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom;
V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
8.30 Swamp People 8
9.30 Detroit Steel
10.25 The Pickers 9
11.20 Counting Cars 7
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 4
1.10 America's War On Drugs
3.00 Storage Wars 11
3.30 Detroit Steel
4.25 The Pickers 9
5.20 Counting Cars 7
6.15 Swamp People 8
7.10 Pawn Stars 18
8.05 Storage Wars: Texas 6
8.30 Storage Wars 11
9.25 Storage Wars: Texas 5
9.55 Forged In Fire 4
10.50 America's War On Drugs

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
9.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
10.00 Making A Model With Yolanda Hadid
11.00 Up! Pretty
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 7
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 The Pastor's Wife
3.35 Murder At Soho House
4.30 Live PD Presents: Women On Patrol
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
7.00 The Amazing Race Canada 3
8.00 Love At First Flight
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 High School Lover
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
7.30 Morning Glory (PG)
9.15 Jesus Christ Superstar Live In Concert (NC16)
11.00 There Will Be Blood (PG)
PM
1.35 All The Money In The World (NC16)
3.45 Muppet Treasure Island (PG)
5.25 Mark Felt: The Man Who Brought Down The White House (NC16)
7.05 American Assassin (NC16)
9.00 Rampage (NC16)
10.45 Final Destination 2 (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
8.15 Miss Evers' Boys
10.10 The Interpreter
PM
12.15 Strike Back 6 (NC16)
1.15 The Godfather 3
4.00 The HBO Movie Show
4.30 61*

6.40 Fletch
8.20 Changing Lanes
10.00 Scream 2 (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
8.15 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
9.15 Dowry (HD)
10.15 Perfect Dating 6 (HD)
11.45 Hong Kong Neighbourhood Gems (HD)
PM
12.15 Still Loving You (HD)
1.30 Signal (HD)
2.45 Hot Door Night 11
3.45 The Doctor (HD)
4.45 Still Loving You (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
8.00 Viva La Romance (HD)
10.00 Noble Aspirations (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
9.30 Tennis: Deuce 2019
10.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2019
11.00 Snooker: 2019 The Masters Highlights – Quarter-finals
PM
2.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
3.00 Mountain Bike: Crankworx World Tour 2018: Rotorua Highlights
4.00 Cycling: 2019 Santos Tour Down Highlights
5.00 Spirit Of Yachting 2018
5.30 FEI Equestrian World 2019
6.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Rio Open Presented By Claro 2019

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.00 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 33 Blackburn Rovers Vs Middlesbrough
9.00 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13) (Live)
PM
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Formosa Dreamers Vs Saigon Heat
2.30 Football: EFL League One 2018 Matchday 33 Southend Vs Portsmouth
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Experience (PG)
5.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 San Miguel Alab Pilipinas Vs Zhuohai Wolf Warriors
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)
8.30 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19
9.00 The Football Review
9.30 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 33 Blackburn Rovers Vs Middlesbrough
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Teen Titans Go!
9.00 Grizzly And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernoobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 Craig Of The Creek
3.00 Rat-A-Tat
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Craig Of The Creek
6.00 Ben 10 Challenge
6.30 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzly And The Lemmings
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 MacGyver 2
6.50 Seal Team
7.40 American Ninja Warrior 7
9.25 MacGyver 2
10.20 Seal Team
11.10 The Amazing Race 30
PM
1.00 Quantico 3
1.50 American Ninja Warrior 7
2.40 MacGyver 2
3.30 Seal Team
4.20 The Amazing Race 30
6.10 Hawaii Five-0 9
7.00 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders 2
7.50 Bad Boys
10.00 The Blacklist 6
10.55 MacGyver 3
11.50 The Blacklist 6

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 Blindspot 3
6.50 Major Crimes 5
7.40 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow
8.30 Person Of Interest 4
9.20 The Flash 4
10.05 Blindspot 3
10.55 Almost Genius
11.45 The Intern
PM
2.00 The Big Bang Theory 11
2.25 Blindspot 3
3.15 Almost Genius
4.05 The Flash 4

4.50 Person Of Interest 4
5.40 Major Crimes 5
6.30 The Flash 4
7.20 The Big Bang Theory 11
7.45 Friends 10
8.10 Almost Genius
9.00 Race To The Scene
9.50 Arrow 7
10.40 The Big Bang Theory 11
11.05 Friends 10
11.30 Hall Pass

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.55 Just For Laughs Gags 14
7.20 Mr Bean
7.50 Most Ridiculous 2
8.15 Amazingness
8.40 Mr Bean
9.10 Caraoke Showdown
9.35 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.00 Hot In Cleveland 2
10.50 Mr Bean
11.20 Saturday Night Live 43
PM
12.10 The Daily Show 24
12.35 All Access: Lilly Singh
1.20 The Comedy Jam
2.10 Saturday Night Live 43
3.00 The Burn With Jeff Ross 2
3.20 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle 3
4.15 Lip Sync Battle 4
4.40 Comedy Central Roast Of Justin Bieber
6.10 The Daily Show 24
6.35 Your Face Or Mine 4
7.05 Amazingness
7.30 Above Average Presents
7.40 Billy On The Street 4
8.00 Stand-up, Asia! 3
8.30 Above Average Presents
8.35 Stand-up, Asia! 3
9.00 Dr Ken
9.30 Just Another Immigrant: Romesh Ranganathan
10.05 The Family Law 3
10.30 Inside Amy Schumer
10.55 Above Average Presents
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 Above Average Presents
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Taste Of Love
7.00 First Love
8.00 King Of Blaze
9.00 Eagle And Youngster
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 King Of Blaze
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.10 First Love
10.00 King Of Blaze
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Take care of that health concern – you have to make sure you are running at full power for the future.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Artistic works get your blood pumping, so put your energy into searching for the next big thing.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Someone is nosing into your business a little too much. Be polite, but firm, as you tell him what is what.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

Clear some small stuff off your plate and things should start to feel a lot less intimidating.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)

Your mental energy is just right for seeing and fixing flaws. The effort will pay off in the long term.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

A tiny detail makes your day, so look out for it. You can get your way without trying too hard.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

You know what you need, but are not sure how to get it. Spend time taking care of your own business.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Your ability to make plans – and stick to them – is quite strong. Go for it.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Avoid the impulse to ask for the stars and the moon. Instead, resolve matters in a reasonable fashion.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

You come back down to earth and feel much better about your situation.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

Ask probing questions and remain sceptical because, even by tonight, things are not what they seem.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)

It is a challenging day, but you need to be as firm while remembering what is most important to you.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Weekdays With Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Weekdays With Charmaine Yee
4.00 On The Drive Home With Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 Glenn & The Flying Dutchman
10.00 The Midday Brew With Charmaine Phua
PM
1.00 Afternoon Tune Up With Cheryl Miles
4.00 The Weekday Getaway With Divian Nair
8.00 Love Songs With Simon Lim

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker & Finance Presenter Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kevin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.17am/7.21pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 7.11pm/6.43am

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 4.39am (1.4m), 10.31am (3.2m), 5.09pm (0.2m). Desaru: 4.26am (1.8m), 9.30am (2.6m), 4.26pm (0.5m), 11.41pm (2.9m). Port Dickson: 12.55am (0.1m), 6.34am (2.7m), 1.47pm (0.4m), 7.08pm (2.7m). Mersing: 4.22am (1.8m), 8.58am (2.5m), 3.48pm (0.6m), 10.59pm (3.4m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 12.03am (2.9m), 5.28am (1.3m), 11.18am (3.3m), 6pm (0.2m). Desaru: 5.07am (1.6m), 10.30am (2.8m), 5.13pm (0.5m). Port Dickson: 1.53am (0m), 7.17am (2.8m), 2.31pm (0.2m), 7.53pm (2.8m). Mersing: 5.04am (1.7m), 9.58am (2.6m), 4.40pm (0.5m), 11.39pm (3.4m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

Seungri's club shuttered



SEOUL • Maybe the anger directed at Seungri (left) will start to dissipate now that Seoul club Burning Sun reportedly stopped operating from Sunday.

The BigBang singer, 28, who owns the club, had come under fire over reports of staff assaulting a clubgoer, and subsequent police investigation of whether it was a hot spot for drug distribution and sexual harassment.

“We have decided to shut down the business, in light of the ongoing investigation. This does not mean that we admit to all the controversies,” the allkpop portal cited a club representative as saying.

An employee was said to have been arrested over drug use.

Seungri, on his part, has tried to repair the damage. Last Saturday at his concert in Seoul, he apologised to his fans, saying: “I feel like if I ignore it, people who came today won’t feel comfortable. I’m sorry for causing any disappointment to so many people and I’m reflecting on what happened.

“Despite there being a controversy, I didn’t act responsibly.

“As I’m a celebrity, I’ll think and act more carefully from now on. I want to apologise for not showing modesty and for acting carelessly.

“For the past year, I’ve been doing my best to bring you all happiness. I’ve brought you disappointment and, for that, I’m ashamed.”

The boss of his management agency, YG Entertainment, has also tried to calm the situation, revealing too that Seungri had resigned as an executive director of the club.

But the move is not directly linked to the hit on its reputation.

The singer, who will perform in Singapore on Saturday, is slated to enlist in mandatory military service soon and the rules forbid a soldier from conducting business activities.



Singer Ryan Adams is alleged to have had a sexual relationship with an underage fan. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ryan Adams’ album launch on hold amid sexual misconduct allegation

NEW YORK • Ryan Adams has said sorry for his past behaviour, but the music labels are not convinced that the public is ready to forgive him.

This has led to a decision not to release a new album by the singer-songwriter, who is reportedly being probed by the Federal Bureau of

Investigation over his communication with an underage fan.

Following an article published by The New York Times last Wednesday about Adams’ treatment of women – from a teenage fan to ex-wife, singer Mandy Moore – FBI agents took the first steps to open a

criminal investigation. Adams, 44, was said to have exchanged sexually explicit images with the teen, who said their contact began when she was 14 and ended when she was 16.

The Grammy-nominated rock and alternative country singer had announced plans to release three

albums this year. The first of those, Big Colours, whose roll-out had been scheduled for April 19, was put on hold indefinitely, according to music retailers.

Two music-equipment companies have also suspended their relationships with the artist. NYTIMES

On social media



TURBULENT BIRTHDAY BASH: It was no laughing matter for sitcom *Friends* stars Jennifer Aniston (far left) and Courteney Cox (left) last Friday.

The plane they were in, chartered to take Aniston and her friends to a celebration in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, to mark her 50th birthday, lost a tyre after take-off.

The pilot deemed that it was unsafe to continue with the flight and decided to return to Los Angeles.

But the emergency landing could not be attempted for several hours.

The pilot had to keep the plane in the air for three hours to burn off fuel so that the aircraft would be lighter, reported the Elle lifestyle portal.

The plane later landed without a hitch at another airport in California. But instead of being shaken by the experience, Aniston and her party of 11, including actress Amanda Anka, wife of actor Jason Bateman, and writer Molly Kimmel, wife of late-night-show host Jimmy Kimmel, were still ready to party.

They switched to another plane to head to Mexico.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/JENNIFER ANISTON

University expels Chinese actor Zhai Tianlin



BEIJING • Chinese actor Zhai Tianlin (left) revealed last week that he had informed Peking University that he wanted to drop out of a management course, but the school has now stated that it is expelling him.

The university has also levelled charges of academic misconduct against Zhai, the latest backlash after netizens voiced doubts over his academic achievements, reported Xinhua.

He highlighted on Weibo his master's and doctoral degrees from Beijing Film Academy, and admittance as a post-doctorate student by the university's Guanghua School of Management.

It led to a number of people searching online for his academic dissertations, with the findings fuelling talk that he copied from others.

In the statement, Peking University approved the management school's decision to expel Zhai and suspended his supervisor's rights to further enrol post-doctorate students.

It found that the supervisor, interview panel and school had not followed strict standards, nor done sufficient document reviews.

Last week, a Ministry of Education spokesman said no academic misconduct would be tolerated, even as Zhai posted an online apology to the schools, teachers and public for being dishonest.

Was actor Jussie Smollett really assaulted?



CHICAGO • Was the incident actually a hoax? An investigation into an alleged attack on an openly gay black actor has “shifted” and police are now seeking a follow-up interview with the *Empire* cast member, a spokesman said on Sunday.

Jussie Smollett (left), 36, reported to the police on Jan 29 that two men had yelled racial and homophobic slurs, poured bleach on him and tied a rope around his neck while he walked downtown in Chicago.

The change in direction came two days after the police said the two “potential suspects” had been released without charge and as

media outlets reported that the incident could have been staged.

“The information received from the individuals questioned by police earlier in the *Empire* case has, in fact, shifted the trajectory of the investigation,” Chicago police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said.

“We’ve reached out to the *Empire* cast member’s attorney to request a follow-up interview,” he added.

Multiple media outlets reported that the two men are brothers who were arrested at Chicago’s O’Hare airport upon their return from a trip to Nigeria.

At least one of the men reportedly worked on *Empire*, a television series about the fortunes of a hip-hop mogul and his family battling over control of a multi-million-dollar music company.

In an emotional interview on ABC’s *Good Morning America* broadcast last Thursday, Smollett gave details of the purported attack and said he was angry at doubts about its veracity.

Initial reports of the attack shocked the entertainment industry and brought waves of support from advocacy groups and politicians. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

In short

Miranda Lambert is married

Country singer Miranda Lambert has revealed that she is married to policeman Brendan McLoughlin. They tied the knot last month, with no previous reports or sightings of them dating.

Alita: Battle Angel soars to the top of North American box office

Alita: Battle Angel won the fight to rule the North American box office over the weekend. The *Lego Movie 2: The Second Part* came in second, while *Isn't It Romantic* claimed the No. 3 spot.